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VOL. VI

# THE SUPREME POWER

M. K. GANDHI





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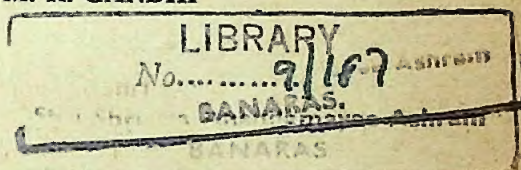


"GANDHI SERIES" No. 6

# THE SUPREME POWER

By

**M. K. GANDHI**



**EDITED AND PUBLISHED**

By

**ANAND T. HINGORANI**



**1963**

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## PREFACE

This universe of ours, so full of wonder, mystery and charm, has always excited in the mind of man a great curiosity to know its Creator. The sun, the moon, the stars and other heavenly bodies that we see revolving in the sky, the organic and the inorganic world that surrounds us with all its marvels and fills us every moment of our life with reverence and awe,—all these bear an eloquent testimony to the fact that there is at work, behind all this manifestation, some Supreme Power which, call it what you will, not only keeps the universe going, but also regulates even the smallest of its acts in perfect obedience to its will. This Creative Power or Force, which produces and sustains all that is, and which, though unseen, is yet all-pervading and all-embracing, is called by an infinite variety of names, such as *Ishwara*, *Paramatma*, *Khuda*, *Allah*, *Jehovah*, God, Nature, etc. However, all the great religions of the world have declared with one voice that there is only one God, one without a second.

But though God is certainly one, His manifestations are innumerable. That being so, His definitions, too, are innumerable. "But behind all that variety of definitions", says Gandhiji, "there would be also a certain sameness which would be unmistakable. For, the root is one. God is that indefinable something which we all feel, but which we do not know." To Gandhiji, however, Truth is the only correct and significant name for God. For him, God is Truth and Truth is God. God is, because Truth is.

The belief in this indefinable and mysterious Power or God is as old as the human race. "Ever since its com-



mencement, the world, the wise and the foolish included, has proceeded upon the assumption that if we are, God is; and that if God is not, we are not." But, in spite of this universal belief, there are not a few who take delight in denying the existence of God. Of such, Gandhiji says: "Let the ignorant dispute the existence; I am one of the millions of wise men who believe in Him and am never tired of bowing to Him and singing His glory."

Myself being in the category of such "ignorant" people, I had once occasion to ask Gandhiji how to cultivate faith in God. In reply to my earnest query, he wrote to say: "The way to cultivate faith in God is to recognize our nothingness and thus be humble as the particle of dust. The best of us at his very best is a tiny thing and utterly helpless. And yet, we are not so helpless the moment we know that we are sparks from the Divine which is in us. Faith does not come from reason. Faith is believing. Believe in God because those whose names we hold sacred have believed and testified."

God of Gandhiji's conception, however, is not an external entity, a deity to be worshipped and adored from afar. "God is not a Power residing in the clouds. God is an Unseen Power residing within us and nearer to us than finger-nails to the flesh." From his own rich personal experience Gandhiji tells us that if we wish to see God, we must see Him in His creation and be one with it. He, therefore, advises us to identify ourselves with the whole of humanity and learn to place service above self. This selfless service he considers as the highest religion. But as this service "which has not the slightest touch of self in it", can be rendered only by those whose hearts have been purged of passions, he lays great stress on self-puri-

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PREFACE

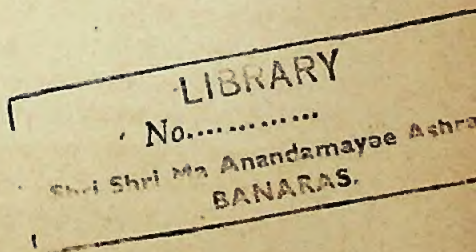
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fication in which prayer plays a very powerful part. Prayer, for Gandhiji, is neither a petition nor a praise. It is the longing of the soul. Speaking for himself, he says: "I can do, and have often done; without food for days on end, but I cannot do without prayers even for a single day." He regards prayer as the food for the soul and believes that it is "even more essential for the well-being of the soul than is food for the maintenance of the body."

In this book, the reader will find Gandhiji throwing light on many a complex problem which baffle the intellect and defy solution by reason. With the heart of a devotee and the eye of faith, he has explained in his inimitable way the mystery of the universe, as also the nature and function of God and His creation. Likewise, he has also suggested the means of realizing the Supreme Power. The doubters will find their doubts dispelled and the believers their belief confirmed as a result of the perusal of these pages—at least that is my hope and prayer.

ANAND T. HINGORANI

7, Edmonstone Road,  
April 16, 1963.









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## CHAPTER I

### GOD IS ONE

*"Who can name Him, and knowing what he says,  
Say : 'I believe in Him' ? And who can feel,  
And, with self-violence, to conscious wrong  
Hardening his heart, say : 'I believe Him not' !  
The All-Embracing, All-Sustaining One,  
Say : Does He not embrace, sustain, include  
Thee—Me—Himself ? Bends not the sky above ?  
And earth, on which we are, is it not firm ?  
And over us, with constant kindly smile,  
The sleepless stars keep everlasting watch !  
Am I not here gazing into thine eyes ?*

*And does not all, that is,  
—Seen and unseen—mysterious All—  
Around thee, and within,  
Untiring agency,  
Press on thy heart and mind ?*

*— Fill thy whole heart with it—and, when thou art  
Lost in the consciousness of happiness,*

*Then call it what thou wilt  
Happiness !—Heart !—Love !—God !*

*I have no name for it !*

*Feeling is all in all !*

*Name is but sound and reek,*

*A mist around the glow of Heaven."*

*—Goethe's Faust*

**G**OD is certainly One. He has no second. He is unfathomable, unknowable and unknown to the vast majority of mankind. He is everywhere. He sees without eyes, and hears without ears. He is formless and indivisible. He is uncreate, has no father, mother or child; and yet He allows Himself to be worshipped as father, mother, wife and child. He allows himself even to be



worshipped as stock and stone, although He is none of these things. He is the most elusive. He is the nearest to us if we would but know the fact. But He is farthest from us when we do not want to realize His omnipresence. There are many gods in the *Vedas*. Other scriptures call them angels. But the *Vedas* sing of only one God.<sup>1</sup>

There is only one God for us all, whether we find Him through the *Quran*, the *Bible*, the *Zend Avesta*, the *Talmud*, or the *Gita*. And He is God of Truth and Love.<sup>2</sup>

Historians have testified from the dawn of human wisdom to the unity of God; and the unity of all life in God was taught in the earliest hymns that the world knew—the *Rigveda*. They first taught that God was one, and all life was from Him and in Him.<sup>3</sup>

I believe in absolute oneness of God and, therefore, also of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source.<sup>4</sup>

All life (not only human beings, but all sentient beings) is one, *i.e.* all life coming from the One Universal Source, call it *Allah*, God or *Parameshwara*. There is in Hinduism a scripture called *Vishnusahasranama*, which simply means 'one thousand names of God'. These one thousand names do not mean that God is limited to those names, but that He has as many names as you can possibly give Him. You may give Him as many names as you like, provided it is one God without a second, whose name you are invoking. That also means that He is nameless, too.<sup>5</sup>

God there is only one; but He enables me to see Him and worship Him in stone, in an Englishman, in a traitor if you will. For, I shall not hate even a traitor. My religion takes me to that length.<sup>6</sup>

All religions enjoin worship of the One God who is all-pervasive. He is present even in a droplet of water or

in a tiny speck of dust. Even those who worship idol, worship not the stone of which it is made; they try to see God who resides in it. Various religions are like the leaves of a tree. No two leaves are alike, yet there is no antagonism between them or between the branches on which they grow. Even so, there is an underlying unity in the variety which we see in God's creation.<sup>7</sup>

### *Advaitism and God*

I BELIEVE in *Advaita* (non-dualism). I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives. . . . When we descend to the empirical level, we descend to the world of duality. In God, there is no duality. But as soon as we descend to the empirical level, we get two forces—God and Satan, as Christianity calls them. Other terms for the two are used in Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Islam.<sup>8</sup>

I am an *Advaitist* and yet I can support *Dvaitism* (dualism). The world is changing every moment and is, therefore, unreal; it has no permanent existence. But, though it is constantly changing, it has something about it which persists and it is, therefore, to that extent real. I have, therefore, no objection to calling it real and unreal, and thus being called an *Anekantavadi* or a *Syadvadi*. But my *Syadvad* is not the *Syadvad* of the learned; it is peculiarly my own. I cannot engage in a debate with them. It has been my experience that I am always true from my point of view, and am often wrong from the point of view of my honest critics. I know that we are both right from our respective points of view. And this knowledge saves me from attributing motives to my opponents or critics. The seven blind men, who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant, were all right from their respective points of view, and wrong from the point of view of one another, and right and wrong from the point

of view of the man who knew the elephant.

I very much like this doctrine of the manyness of Reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Mussalman from his standpoint, and a Christian from his. Formerly, I used to resent the ignorance of my opponents. Today, I can love them because I am gifted with the eye to see myself as others see me and *vice versa*. I want to take the whole world in the embrace of my love. My *Anekantavad* is the result of the twin doctrine of *Satya* and *Ahimsa*.<sup>9</sup>

### *He is One Yet Many*

I BELIEVE God to be creative as well as non-creative. This, too, is the result of my acceptance of the doctrine of the manyness of Reality. From the platform of the Jains, I prove the non-creative aspect of God; and from that of Ramanuja, the creative aspect. As a matter of fact, we are all thinking of the Unthinkable, describing the Indescribable, seeking to know the Unknown, and that is why our speech falters, is inadequate and even often contradictory. That is why the *Vedas* describe *Brahman* as 'Not this, Not this'. But if He or It is not this, He or It *is*. If we exist, if our parents and their parents have existed, then it is proper to believe in the Parent of the whole creation. If He is not, we are nowhere.

And that is why all of us with one voice call one God differently as *Paramatma*, *Ishwara*, *Shiva*, *Vishnu*, *Rama*, *Allah*, *Khuda*, *Dada Hormuzda*, *Jehova*, *God*, and an infinite variety of names. He is one and yet many; He is smaller than an atom, and bigger than the Himalayas. He is contained even in a drop of the ocean, and yet not even the seven seas can compass Him. Reason is powerless to know Him. He is beyond the reach or grasp of reason. But I need not labour the point. Faith is essential in this matter. My logic can make and unmake



innumerable hypotheses. An atheist might floor me in a debate. But my faith runs so very much faster than my reason that I can challenge the whole world and say: 'God is, was and ever shall be.'

But those who want to deny His existence are at liberty to do so. He is merciful and compassionate. He is not an earthly king needing an army to make us accept His sway. He allows us freedom, and yet His compassion commands obedience to His will. But if any one of us disdain to bow to His will, He says: 'So be it. My sun will shine no less for thee, my clouds will rain no less for thee. I need not force thee to accept My sway.' Of such a God, let the ignorant dispute the existence. I am one of the millions of wise men who believe in Him and am never tired of bowing to Him and singing His glory.<sup>10</sup>

### *God Is*

THERE is an indefinable Mysterious Power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this Unseen Power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses.

But it is possible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent. Even in ordinary affairs we know that people do not know who rules or why and how he rules. And yet they know that there is a Power that certainly rules. In my tour in Mysore, I met many poor villagers and I found upon inquiry that they did not know who ruled Mysore. They simply said some god ruled it. If the knowledge of these poor people was so limited about their ruler, I, who am infinitely lesser than God than they than their ruler, need not be surprised if I do not realize the presence of God—the King of kings. Nevertheless, I do feel, as the poor villagers felt about Mysore, that there is orderliness in the Universe, there

is an unalterable Law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is not a blind law; for no blind law can govern the conduct of living beings; and, thanks to the marvellous researches of Sir J. C. Bose, it can now be proved that even matter is life. That Law, then, which governs all life is God. Law and the Law-giver are one. I may not deny the Law or the Law-giver, because I know so little about it or Him. Even as my denial or ignorance of the existence of an earthly power will avail me nothing, so will not my denial of God and His Law liberate me from its operation; whereas humble and mute acceptance of Divine Authority makes life's journey easier, even as the acceptance of earthly rule makes life under it easier.

I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a Living Power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing Power or Spirit is God. And since nothing else I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is.

And is this Power benevolent or malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent. For, I can see that in the midst of death, life persists; in the midst of untruth, truth persists; in the midst of darkness, light persists. Hence, I gather that God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is the Supreme Good.\*

But He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. He must express Himself in every the smallest act of His votary. This can only be done through a definite realization more real than the five senses can

---

\* "God is Light, not darkness. God is Love, not hate. God is Truth, not untruth. God alone is Great. We, His creatures, are but dust."

ever produce. Sense perceptions can be, often are, false and deceptive, however real they may appear to us. Where there is realization outside the senses, it is infallible. It is proved not by extraneous evidence, but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within.

Such testimony is to be found in the experiences of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes. To reject this evidence is to deny oneself.

This realization is preceded by an immovable faith. He, who would in his own person test the fact of God's presence, can do so by a living faith. And since faith itself cannot be proved by extraneous evidence, the safest course is to believe in the moral government of the world and, therefore, in the supremacy of the Moral Law—the Law of Truth and Love. Exercise of faith will be the safest where there is a clear determination summarily to reject all that is contrary to Truth and Love.

I confess I have no argument to convince through reason. Faith transcends reason. All I can advise is not to attempt the impossible.

I cannot account for the existence of evil by any rational method. To want to do so is to be co-equal with God. I am, therefore, humble enough to recognize evil as such. And I call God long-suffering and patient,\* precisely because He permits evil in the world. I know that He has no evil in Him, and yet if there is evil, He is the author of it and yet untouched by it.

I know, too, that I shall never know God if I do not wrestle with and against evil even at the cost of life itself. I am fortified in the belief by my own humble and limited experience. The purer I try to become, the

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\*"God is long-suffering and patient. He lets the tyrant dig his own grave, only issuing grave warnings at stated intervals."

—*Young India*: May 12, 1927.

nearer I feel to be to God. How much more should I be when my faith is not a mere apology, as it is today, but has become as immovable as the Himalayas and as white and bright as the snows on their peaks? Meanwhile, I pray with Newman who sang from experience :

*"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, -*

*Lead Thou me on;*

*The night is dark and I am far from home,*

*Lead thou me on;*

*Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see*

*The distant scene; one step enough for me."*<sup>11</sup>



## CHAPTER II

### GOOD Vs. EVIL

THERE is an eternal struggle going on in us between the powers of light and powers of darkness, those of truth and of untruth, between God and the Devil. We have to carry on the struggle as best as we may, but we have always to be conscious of our limitations.<sup>1</sup>

Rama and Ravana represent the eternal duel going on between the forces of good and evil. The real illumination comes from within.<sup>2</sup>

Although evil seems at times to rule the world, the eternal truth is that the world lives so long as goodness resides even in one person. Evil is naught.<sup>3</sup>

Why evil exists and what it is,—are questions which appear to be beyond our limited reason. It should be enough to know that both good and evil exist. And as often as we can distinguish between good and evil, we must choose the one and shun the other.<sup>4</sup>

As the *Gita* says: "There is nothing in the world that is entirely free from fault." Let us, therefore, like the fabled swan who rejects the water and takes only the cream, learn to treasure only the good and reject the evil in everything. Nothing and no one is perfect but God.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Distinction Between Good and Evil*

Q. God is *Nirvikara*—free from all passions. Why does He not make us act as we ought to? His influence must be all-powerful.

A. How do we know that He does not act? He has neither truth nor untruth, neither violence nor non-violence.

Q. But it is due to Him that we have *Vikaras*—passions. If it was wrong to have passions, He would not have filled us with them.

A. Oh yes, He has given us all that and yet endowed us with the sense of right and wrong, and also given us a certain amount of choice—the choice between right and wrong, between good and evil.<sup>6</sup>

Anyone blessed with choice or free will to accept and reject, cannot but distinguish between good and evil, virtue and vice. For, these mean, in other words, nothing but things to be accepted and things to be rejected. Thus, robbing some one of his property is a thing to be rejected, hence bad or sinful. We have within us both good and bad desires. It is our duty to cultivate the former and to suppress or eradicate the latter, and if we fail therein, we should remain brutes though born men. Birth as a human being is, therefore, declared by all religions as a rare privilege—a state of probation. And Hinduism says that if we are weighed and found wanting, we should have to be re-born as beasts.<sup>7</sup>

There are certain problems in mathematics, for the solution of which some workable assumptions have to be made. They help in the solution of the problem. But they are purely imaginary, and have no other practical use. Similarly, psychologists have proceeded upon the assumption that a pair of opposite forces is warring against each other in the Universe, of which one is divine and other devilish.... The distinction is made by all the scriptures of the world. I say this distinction is imaginary. God is one, without a second. He alone is. He is indefinable. In reality, there is no God who is at war with Satan; but we have imagined that there is a war going on between God and Satan. The author of the *Mahabharata* has described the war between the opposing forces of the Pandavas and the Kauravas, and has advised men to non-co-operate with the latter.<sup>8</sup>

### *Why is There Evil?*

‘WHY is there evil in the world?’ is a difficult question

to answer. I can only give what I may call a villager's answer. If there is good, there must also be evil, just as where there is light there is also darkness; but it is true only so far as we human mortals are concerned. Before God there is nothing good, nothing evil. We may talk of His dispensation in human terms, but our language is not God's.

The *Vedanta* says the world is *Maya*. Even that explanation is a babbling of imperfect humanity. I, therefore, say that I am not going to bother my head about it. Even if I was allowed to peep into the innermost recess of God's chamber, I should not care to do it. For, I should not know what to do there. It is enough for our spiritual growth to know that God is always with the door of good.

'But if He is All-mighty, as unquestionably He is, why does He not free us from evil?'

I would rule out this question, too. God and we are not equals. Equals may put such questions to one another, but not unequals. Villagers do not ask why town-dwellers do things which if they did would mean certain destruction.

'I quite see what you mean. It is a strong point you have made. But who made God?'

If He is All-powerful, He must have made Himself.

'Do you think he is an autocrat or a democrat?'

I do not think these things at all. I do not want to divide the power with Him, and hence I am absolved from having to consider these questions. I am content with the doing of the task in front of me. I do not worry about the why and wherefore of things.

'But has He not given us reason?'

Indeed, He has. But that reason helps us to see that we should not dabble in things we cannot fathom. It is my implicit belief that a true villager has an amazing

amount of common sense and, therefore, he never worries about these things.

'Then I will now ask a different question. Do you believe it is easier to be evil than good, that a descent is easier than an ascent?'

Apparently, it is so. But, really, it is easier to be good than to be evil. Of course, poets have said that descent to hell is easy, but I do not think so. Nor do I think there are more bad people in the world than good. In that case, God himself would be evil and not an embodiment of *Ahimsa* or love which He is.

'May I know your definition of *Ahimsa* ?'

*Ahimsa* means avoiding injury to anything on earth, in thought, word and deed.<sup>9</sup>

### *God's Hand Behind Both*

IN God's world unmixed evil never prospers. God rules even where Satan seems to hold sway, because the latter exists only on His sufferance.<sup>10</sup>

Often does good come out of evil. But that is God's, not man's plan. Man knows that only evil can come out of evil, as good out of good.<sup>11</sup>

In a strictly scientific sense, God is at the bottom of both good and evil. He directs the assassin's dagger no less than the surgeon's knife. But for all that, good and evil are, for human purposes, from each other distinct and incompatible, being symbolical of light and darkness, God and Satan, Ahriman and Ormuzd respectively.<sup>12</sup>

God's hand is behind good, but in God's hand it is not mere good. His hand is behind evil also, but there it is no longer evil. 'Good' and 'evil' is our own imperfect language. God is above both good and evil.

'Is evil also made by God?'

Nothing can possibly exist without His allowing. it,



He makes many things inverted which must be put right. We must invert the process. God has given us conscience. He has given us the power to do right. If I take your thing with your permission, it is right. If I take it without your permission, it is stealing and I must put it back in its own place.<sup>13</sup>

To say that God permits evil in this world may not be pleasing to the ear. But if He is held responsible for the good, it follows that He has to be responsible for the evil, too. Did not God permit Ravana to exhibit unparalleled strength? Perhaps, the root cause of the perplexity arises from a lack of the real understanding of what God is. God is not a person. He transcends description. He is the Law-maker, the Law and the Executor. No human being can well arrogate these powers to himself. If he did, he would be looked upon as an unadulterated dictator. They become only Him whom we worship as God. This is the reality.<sup>14</sup>

## CHAPTER III

### THE LAW AND THE LAW-GIVER

THERE can be no manner of doubt that this Universe of sentient beings is governed by a Law. If you can think of Law without its Giver, I would say that the Law is the Law-giver, that is God. When we pray to the Law, we simply yearn after knowing the Law and obeying it. We become what we yearn after. Hence, the necessity for prayer. Though our present life is governed by our past, our future must by that very Law of Cause and Effect be affected by what we do now. To the extent, therefore, that we feel the choice between two or more courses, we must make that choice.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing can happen but by His will expressed in His eternal, changeless Law which is He. We neither know Him nor His Law save through the glass darkly. But the faint glimpse of the Law is sufficient to fill me with joy, hope, and faith in the future.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, it may even be said that the Law which holds together the Universe is indistinguishable from the Law-Maker. Speaking in human language, one might even go so far as to say that God Himself is subject to the Wheel of the Law. We are used to the saying that "the king can do no wrong." But in God's Universe even such a distinction is hardly permissible. One can only say that "there can be no wrong in the Law, for the Law and the Law-maker are one and the same." There is no scope for even the least little blade of grass to be free from the operation of God's laws.<sup>3</sup>

I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an Idea, Law Himself, therefore, it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the

Law. He, therefore, does not rule our actions and withdraw Himself. When we say He rules our actions, we are simply using human language and we try to limit Him. Otherwise, He and His Law abide everywhere and govern everything. Therefore, I do not think that He answers in every detail every request of ours, but there is no doubt that He rules our action, and I literally believe that not a blade of grass grows or moves without His will. The free will we enjoy is less than that of a passenger on a crowded deck.\*

'Do you feel a sense of freedom in your communion with God'?

I do. I do not feel cramped as I would on a boat full of passengers. Although I know that my freedom is less than that of a passenger, I appreciate that freedom as I have imbibed through and through the central teaching of the *Gita* that man is the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice as to the manner in which he uses that freedom. But he is no controller of results. The moment he thinks he is, he comes to grief.<sup>4</sup>

### *Predestination*

'WHAT is your opinion about predestination'?

It is a much-abused word. It is true that we are not quite as free as we imagine. Our past holds us. But like all other doctrines this may well be ridden to death.

'How can one overcome the unpleasant effects of one's predestination since predestination is a reality'?

By taking the pleasant with the unpleasant in perfect detachment and thereby sterilizing the unpleasant of its

\*Q. Has the soul 'free will' or 'choice' and, if so, how much?

A. Man has got a choice, but as much of it as a passenger on board a ship has. It is just enough for him. If we don't use it, then we are practically dead.

— *Conversations of Gandhiji*: p. 28.

sting, even as you have tackled the problem of the prickly pear by removing its thorn through judicious selection and cultivation and converting it into edible fodder for cattle.<sup>5</sup>

### *Personal God*

"DO you believe in a personal God?"

I don't. I don't believe God to be a personal being in the sense that we are personal beings. I understand God to be Universal Law. God, however, cannot be described in His fullness. We human beings describe Him in our own vocabulary. God is the Law as well as the Law-giver. The two are one. In Buddhism, God is described as the Law. Many people say that Buddhism is atheistic. I have never thought so.<sup>6</sup>

"You have said: 'God is the Law and the Law-giver'. I do not understand it. Laws are made by man and they keep on changing with time. For instance, Draupadi had five husbands and yet she was considered a *Sati*. A woman who does that today will be considered immoral."

Law here means the Law of God. Man interprets that Law according to his understanding. For instance, the rotation of the earth is a law of Nature. We are convinced of its correctness today. Yet before Galileo, astronomers believed differently. As for Draupadi, the *Mahabharata*, in my opinion, is an allegory and not history. Draupadi means the soul wedded to the five senses.<sup>7</sup>

### *An Act of Faith*

Q. Tolstoy writes :

"I speak of a personal God, whom I do not acknowledge for the sake of convenience of expression. There are two Gods. There is the God people generally believe in, a God who has to serve them sometimes in a very refined way: perhaps merely by giving them peace of mind. This God does not exist. But the God whom we all have to serve does exist and is the prime cause of our existence and of all we perceive."



Which of these two Gods do you believe in, for if a man believes in the second God, prayer has no meaning for him?

A. I believe in both the Gods, the one who serves us, as well as the other whom we serve. It is impossible that we should render service and not receive some return for it. But in fact both these Gods are imaginary. God, who really is beyond the reach of human imagination, does not serve, nor is He served. No epithet applies to Him, for God is not an external entity, but abides in the human heart. And as we do not know how God works, we should remember Him whom our mind cannot reach. The moment we thus remember Him, our own imagination bodies Him forth. In fact, theism is not a product of the human intellect but an act of faith. Intellect here is of little use. And directly we believe in God, no further speculation is necessary as regards the ways of the world, for, as we believe in God, we likewise believe that no part of His creation is without a purpose.<sup>8</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### FAITH IN GOD

EVERYONE has faith in God, though everyone does not know it. For, everyone has faith in himself and that multiplied to *n*th degree is God. The sum total of all that lives is God. We may not be God but we are of God, even as a little drop of water is of the ocean. Imagine it torn away from the ocean and flung millions of miles away. It becomes helpless, torn from its surroundings, and cannot feel the might and majesty of the ocean. But if someone could point out to it that it is of the ocean, its faith would revive, it would dance with joy and the whole of the might and majesty of the ocean would be reflected in it.<sup>1</sup>

It is the fashion, nowadays, to dismiss God from life altogether and insist on the possibility of reaching the highest kind of life without the necessity of a living faith in a living God. I must confess my inability to drive the truth of the Law home to those who have no faith in, and no need for, a Power infinitely higher than themselves. My own experience has led me to the knowledge that fullest life is impossible without an immovable belief in a Living Law, in obedience to which the whole Universe moves. A man without that faith is like a drop thrown out of the ocean bound to perish. Every drop in the ocean shares its majesty, and has the honour of giving us the ozone of life.<sup>2</sup>

#### *The Living Faith*

I DO have a living faith in a living God, even as I have a living faith in many things that 'scientists tell me. It may be retorted that what the scientists say can be verified, if one followed the prescription given for realizing the facts which are taken for granted. Precisely in that manner speak the *Rishis* and the Prophets. They say

anybody following the path they have trodden can realize God. The fact is we do not want to follow the path leading to realization, and we won't take the testimony of eye-witnesses about the one thing that really matters. Not all the achievements of physical sciences put together can compare with that which gives us a living faith in God. Those who do not want to believe in the existence of God, do not believe in the existence of anything apart from the body. Such a belief is held to be unnecessary for the progress of humanity. For such persons the weightiest argument in proof of the existence of soul or God is of no avail. You cannot make a person who has stuffed his ears, listen to, much less appreciate, the finest music. Even so can you not convince those about the existence of a living God who do not want the conviction ?

Fortunately, the vast majority of people do have a living faith in a living God. They cannot, will not, argue about it. For them "it is". Are all the scriptures of the world old women's tales of superstition ? Is the testimony of the *Rishis*, the Prophets to be rejected ? Is the testimony of Chaitanya, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Tukaram, Dnyandeva, Ramdas, Nanak, Kabir, Tulsidas of no value ? What about Ramamohan Ray, Devendranath Tagore, Vivekananda—all modern men as well educated as the tallest among the living ones ? I omit the living witnesses whose evidence would be considered unimpeachable. This belief in God has to be based on faith which transcends reason.\* Indeed, even the so-called

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\* "The way to cultivate faith in God is to recognize our nothingness and thus be humble as the particle of dust. You know the prayer to Mother Earth in our morning verses. The best of us at his very best is a tiny thing and utterly helpless. And yet we are not so helpless the moment we know that we are sparks from the Divine which is in us. Faith does not come from reason. Faith is believing. Believe in God because those whose names we hold sacred have believed and testified."

— From A Letter to Anand T. Hingorani : Nov. 22, 1930.

realization has at bottom an element of faith without which it cannot be sustained. In the very nature of things, it must be so. Who can transgress the limitations of his being? I hold that complete realization is impossible in this embodied life. Nor is it necessary. A living, immovable faith is all that is required for reaching the full spiritual height attainable by human beings. God is not outside this earthly case of ours. Therefore, exterior proof is not of much avail, if any at all. We must ever fail to perceive Him through the senses, because He is beyond them. We can feel Him, if we will but withdraw ourselves from the senses. The divine music is incessantly going on within ourselves, but the loud senses drown the delicate music which is unlike and infinitely superior to anything we can perceive or hear with our senses.<sup>3</sup>

### *Existence of God*

SEEING that God is to be found within, no research in physical sciences can give one a living faith in the Divine. Some have undoubtedly been helped even by physical sciences. but these are to be counted on one's fingertips. My suggestion, therefore, to you is not to argue about the existence of Divinity, just as you do not argue about your existence, but simply assume like Euclid's axioms that God is, if only because innumerable teachers have left their evidence, and, what is more, their lives are unimpeachable evidence.<sup>4</sup>

We must believe in the existence of God, inasmuch as we believe in our own. Living beings exist and so does God Who is the sum-total of all life.

By a disbelief in God we injure ourselves in the same way as if we disbelieved in ourselves. That is to say, not to believe in God is something like suicide. But it



is one thing to believe in God, and quite another thing to conduct ourselves as if we had such a living faith. As a matter of fact, there is no atheist in the world; atheism is a mere pretence.<sup>5</sup>

*Only in His Strength We are Strong*

BUT, far be it from me to suggest that you should believe in the God that I believe in. Maybe, your definition is different from mine; but your belief in that God must be your ultimate mainstay. It may be some Supreme Power or some Being, even indefinable, but belief in it is indispensable. To bear all kinds of tortures without a murmur or resentment is impossible for a human being without the strength that comes from God. Only in His strength, we are strong. And only those, who can cast their cares and their fears on that Immeasurable Power, have faith in God.<sup>6</sup>

*My Belief in God*

I HAVE made the world's faith in God my own, and as my faith is ineffaceable, I regard that faith as amounting to experience. However, as it may be said that to describe faith as experience is to tamper with Truth, it may perhaps be more correct to say that I have no word for characterizing my belief in God.<sup>7</sup>

It (belief in God) can never be a matter for argument. If you would have me convince others by argument, I am floored. But I can tell you this that I am surer of His existence than of the fact that you and I are sitting in this room. Then, I can also testify that I may live without air and water but not without Him. You may pluck out my eyes, but that cannot kill me. You may chop off my nose, but that will not kill me. But blast my belief in God, and I am dead. You may call this a superstition, but I confess it is a superstition that

I hug, even as I used to hug the name of *Rama* in my childhood when there was any cause of danger or alarm. That was what an old nurse had taught me.<sup>8</sup>

*God is Great*

I CLAIM to be a man of faith and prayer, and even if I were cut to pieces, I trust God would give me the strength not to deny Him, but to assert that He is.

The Mussalman says: "He is, and there is no one else."

The Christian says the same thing, and so does the Hindu.

And, if I may say so, even the Buddhist says the same thing, if in different words.

We may each of us be putting our own interpretation on the word 'God',—God who embraces not only this tiny globe of ours, but millions and billions of such globes.

How can we, little crawling creatures, so utterly helpless as He has made us, possibly measure His greatness, His boundless love, His infinite compassion, such that He allows man insolently to deny Him, to wrangle about Him, and even to cut the throat of his fellow-man? How can we measure the greatness of God who is so forgiving, so divine?<sup>9</sup>

*How Faith Can be Strengthened*

I WAS at first lacking in faith, but I acquired it by contemplation and study of religions. It grows stronger from day to day, as I have an increasing realization of the fact that God abides with me in my heart. One man's experience in this line is of no use to another. Faith can be strengthened only by constant effort informed by faith.<sup>10</sup>

Faith should not be indiscriminating or blind. For instance, as regards some question, which can be solved by human intelligence, some one may say: "I do not

care what the intellect has got to say in the matter; I will hold a particular belief from faith:" his faith is not characterized by humility. It is for the human intellect to decide whether the earth is round or flat. Yet, if some one says he has full faith that it is flat, his faith is not coupled with humility.<sup>11</sup>

The intelligence becomes keener as faith grows deeper. Indeed, the *Gita* teaching seems to be this that it is for God to endow us with understanding, while it is for man to become richer and richer in faith. We have to grasp the implications of faith (*Shraddha*) and understanding (*Buddhi*), but this grasp, too, is obtained not by the study of definitions but by real humility. He who thinks that he knows, knows nothing. He who thinks that he knows nothing, acquires knowledge in God's good time. Even Almighty God cannot pour a single drop of water into a pitcher that is full to the brim. We have, therefore, every day to stand before God as beggars with empty hands.<sup>12</sup>

### *Faith in The Living God*

Q. How can we bring man back to God?

A. I might give the answer that Jesus gave to one of his followers: "Do the will of my Father who is in Heaven, not merely say 'Lord, Lord'." That holds true of you, me and everybody. If we have faith in the living God, all will be well with us. I hope not to lose that faith even to my dying day. In spite of my numerous failings and shortcomings, of which I am but too well aware, my faith in God is burning brighter every day. If it did not, I would take the same prescription that I gave to women threatened with dishonour and with no prospect of help or escape *viz.*, commit suicide.<sup>13</sup>

If we had no faith in the Ultimate Good, we would lose all hope.<sup>14</sup>

## CHAPTER V

### ATHEISM

**A** *THEIST* : Your way of life appeals to me very much. It offers scope for the exercise of individual will. The idea of God introduces a determinism and that limits man. It interferes with his free will.

*Gandhiji* : Is there such a thing as free will ? What is it ? We are all mere playthings in the hands of Providence.

*Atheist* : What is the relationship between God and man, between Truth and God ?

*Gandhiji* : I used to say 'God is Truth'. That did not completely satisfy me. So I said 'Truth is God'. He and His Law are not different. God's Law is God Himself. To interpret it, man has to resort to intense prayer and merge himself in God. Each one will interpret it in his or her own way. As for the relationship between man and God, man does not become man by virtue of having two feet and two hands. He becomes man by becoming the tabernacle of God.

*Atheist* : When my idea of God itself is not clear, your talk of man becoming the tabernacle of God makes thing still more confusing.

*Gandhiji* : Yet it is the true conception. Unless we have the realization that the body is the house of God, we are less than men. And, where is the difficulty or confusion in conceiving Truth as God ? You will concede that we are not tabernacles of Untruth : We are of Truth. Everyone who wants to live a true life has to face difficulties in life, some of which appear insurmountable. At that time, prayer and faith in God, that is, Truth, alone will sustain you. The fellow-feeling which makes you feel miserable because of your brother's misery is godliness. You may call yourself an atheist, but so long as



you feel akin with mankind, you accept God in practice. I remember clergymen who came to the funeral of the great atheist, Bradlaugh. They said they had come to pay their homage because he was a godly man.\*

If you go back with a living faith in God, in Truth, I have no doubt that your work will flourish. You should feel dissatisfied with everything till you have found Him and you will find Him.<sup>1</sup>

### *To An Atheist*

A HUMANITARIAN outlook is a necessity, but it can never be a substitute for God. God is there, but our conception of God is limited by our mental horizon and by our physical environment. For instance, when you read the *Bible*, you find that the God of the Hebrews was quite different from the God of Jesus Christ. You are dissatisfied with the prevalent idea about God, for the simple reason that those who profess belief in God do not present a living God in their own lives.... Unless you have a living faith in God to sustain you, when failure stares you in the face, there is disappointment in store for you.

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\* "It was about this time that Bradlaugh died. He was buried in the Woking Cemetery. I attended the funeral, as I believe every Indian residing in London did. A few clergymen also were present to do him the last honours. On our way back from the funeral, we had to wait at the station for our train. A champion atheist from the crowd heckled one of these clergymen: "Well, Sir, you believe in the existence of God?"

"I do," said the good man in a low tone.

"You also agree that the circumference of the Earth is 28,000 miles, don't you?" said the atheist, with a smile of self-assurance.

"Indeed".

"Pray, tell me, then, the size of your God and where He may be."

"Well, if we but knew, He resides in the hearts of us both."

"Now, now, don't take me to be a child," said the champion with a triumphant look at us.

The clergyman assumed a humble silence.

This talk still further increased my prejudice against atheism."

— *My Experiments with Truth*: p. 61.

The seers have described God as 'नेति, नेति' ('Not this, Not this'). Truth will elude you. The sum total of all that is true is Truth. But you can't sum up all that is true. Like most of those who have had Western education, you have got an analytical mind. But there are things that can't be analyzed. A God who can be analyzed by my poor intellect won't satisfy me. Therefore, I do not try to analyze Him. I go behind the relative to the Absolute and get my peace of mind.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Root is One*

THOSE who believe in the soul as apart from and capable of life independent of and after the dissolution of the body cannot be called atheists. We may all have different definitions for 'God'. If we could all give our own definitions of God, there would be as many definitions as there are men and women. But behind all that variety of definitions, there would be also a certain sameness which would be unmistakable. For, the root is one. God is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know. Charles Bradlaugh described himself as an atheist no doubt, but many a Christian declined to regard him as such. He recognized in Bradlaugh a greater kinship with himself than many a lip Christian. I had the privilege of attending the funeral of that good friend of India. I noticed several clergymen at the function. There were certainly several Mussalmans and many Hindus in the procession. They all believed in God. Bradlaugh's denial of God was a denial of Him as He was known to Bradlaugh to have been described. His was an eloquent and indignant protest against the then current theology and the terrible contrast between precept and practice.

To me, God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light

and Life, and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For, in His boundless love, God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves. He does not take us at our word, for He knows that we often do not mean it, some knowingly and others unknowingly.

He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply *is* to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us. One may banish the word 'God', but one has no power to banish the Thing Itself. What is solemn affirmation if it is not the same thing as in the name of God? And, surely, conscience is but a poor and laborious paraphrase of the simple combination of three letters called 'God'.

He cannot cease to be because hideous immoralities or inhuman brutalities are committed in His name. He is long-suffering. He is patient, but He is also terrible. He is the most exacting personage in the world and the world to come. He metes out the same measure to us that we mete out to our neighbours—men and brutes. With Him, ignorance is no excuse. And withal, He is ever forgiving, for He always gives us the chance to repent.

He is the greatest democrat the world knows,\* for He leaves us 'unfettered' to make our own choice between

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\* "What a great democrat He is! What an amount of wrong and humbug. He suffers on our part! He ever suffers us, insignificant creatures of His, to question His very existence, though He is in every atom about us, around us and within us. But He has reserved to Himself the right of becoming manifest to whomsoever He chooses. He is a Being without hands and feet and other organs, yet he can see Him to whom He chooses to reveal Himself."

evil and good. He is the greatest tyrant ever known, for He often dashes the cup from our lips and, under cover of free will, leaves us a margin so wholly inadequate as to provide only mirth for Himself at our expense. Therefore it is that Hinduism calls it all His sport—*Lila*, or calls it all an illusion—*Maya*. We are *not*, He alone *Is*. And if we will be, we must eternally sing His praise and do His will. Let us dance to the tune of His *bansi*—lute, and all would be well.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Denial of the Atheist*

Q. Of Bradlaugh you say that his denial of God was a denial of Him as He was known to Bradlaugh to have been described. Was this denial inclusive, or was it exclusive, of that 'certain unmistakable sameness' behind all that variety of definitions which there would be if we could all give our own definitions of God, as you say? I presume, it cannot be the latter, for Bradlaugh was learned and observant enough. If the former is the case, what made Bradlaugh deny the existence of God even in the aspect of that 'unmistakable sameness'?

A. I present these definitions of God: The sum total of *Karma* is God. That which impels man to do the right is God. The sum total of all that lives is God. That which makes man the mere plaything of fate is God. That which sustained Bradlaugh throughout all his trials was God. He is the Denial of the atheist.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Belief in God*

I HAVE heard it contended times without number, and I have read in books also, claiming to express the spirit of Buddhism, that Buddha did not believe in God. In my humble opinion, such a belief contradicts the very central fact of Buddha's teaching. In my humble opinion, the confusion has arisen over his rejection and just rejection



of all the base things that passed in his generation under the name of God. He undoubtedly rejected the notion that a being called God was actuated by malice, could repent of his actions, and, like the kings of the earth, could possibly be open to temptations and bribes and could possibly have favourites. His whole soul rose in mighty indignation against the belief that a being called God required for his satisfaction the living blood of animals in order that he might be pleased,—animals who were his own creation. He, therefore, reinstated God in the right place and dethroned the usurper who for the time being seemed to occupy that White Throne. He emphasized and redeclared the eternal and unalterable existence of the moral government of this Universe. He unhesitatingly said that the Law was God Himself.

God's laws are eternal and unalterable, and not separable from God Himself. It is an indispensable condition of His very perfection. And hence the great confusion that Buddha disbelieved in God and simply believed in the Moral Law, and because of this confusion about God Himself, arose the confusion about the proper understanding of the great word *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* is undoubtedly not utter extinction. So far as I have been able to understand the central fact of Buddha's life, *Nirvana* is utter extinction of all that is base in us, all that is vicious in us, all that is corrupt and corruptible in us. *Nirvana* is not like the black, dead peace of the grave, but the living peace, the living happiness of a soul which is conscious of itself, and conscious of having found its own abode in the heart of the Eternal.<sup>5</sup>

#### Posers

Q. What is the difference between the so-called atheism of the Jains and the theism of the *Gita*?

A. I do not think there is any contradiction between

the Jain and the Vedic doctrines. They are only different ways of looking at the same thing. The God of *Vedic* Hinduism is doer as well as non-doer, inasmuch as action does not affect Him and He has not to enjoy the fruit of action. The Universe is not the result of any *Karma* (action) of God in the sense in which you use that word. Therefore, there is no discrepancy in the *Gita* verses quoted by you. Remember that the *Gita* is a poem. God neither says nor does anything. He did not say anything to Arjuna. The conversation between the Lord and Arjuna is imaginary. I do not think there was any such conversation between the Krishna and the Arjuna of history. There is nothing improper or untruthful in the setting of the *Gita*. There was a custom of casting religious books into such a shape, and we cannot find fault with any cultured individual even today who employs such a vehicle for his ideas. The Jains put it logically, unpoetically and drily and said that there is no Creator of the Universe. There is nothing wrong in saying so. However, mankind cannot live by logic alone, but needs poetry. Therefore, even the Jain rationalists found it necessary to have temples, images and similar aids for the spirit of man, which are ruled out by mere logic.

Q. If God is not a doer, who dispenses grace? Is prayer anything more than the expression of a person's wishes?

A. In answering your first question I have in effect also answered the second. Grace is the diction of poetry. Devotion (*Bhakti*) is itself poetry. But poetry is no improper or inferior or unnecessary thing. On the contrary, it is badly needed. Science would tell us that water is a chemical compound of hydrogen and oxygen, but, in the language of poetry, water is the gift of God. Understanding such poetry is an essential element of life, while ignorance of the chemical composition of water does not

matter in the least. It is perfectly logical to say that whatever happens is the fruit of action. But 'impenetrable is the secret of action'. (*Gita* : IV-17). We mortals are so constituted that we cannot know all the causative factors of even a very ordinary event. We are, therefore, perfectly right in saying that nothing happens except by the will and the grace of God. Again, the body is a prison for the soul, who is like the air enclosed by a jar. The air in the jar is ineffective so long as it thinks itself to be different from the atmosphere. In the same way, the soul imprisoned in the body will be unable to draw upon the Reservoir of Power, that is God, so long as she imagines herself to be a doer. Therefore, to say that whatever happens happens by the will of God is to state a matter of fact, and such humility befits a seeker of Truth. A lover of Truth entertains only righteous wishes which are bound to be fulfilled. Our prayers bear fruit for the world to the extent that our soul is grounded in Truth. The Universe is not different from us, and we are not different from the Universe. We are all members one of another, and influence one another by our actions. Actions here include thoughts, so that not a single thought is without its effect. Therefore, we must cultivate the habit of always thinking good thoughts.<sup>6</sup>

### *How to Convert Atheists*

Q. How can one convert atheists to belief in God and religion?

A. There is only one way. The true servant of God can convert the atheist by means of his own purity and good conduct. It can never be done by argument. Innumerable books have been written to prove the existence of God, and if argument could have prevailed, there would not be a single atheist in the world today. But the opposite is the case. In spite of all the literature on the subject,

atheism is on the increase. Often, however, the man who calls himself an atheist is not one in reality; and the converse also is equally true. Atheists sometimes say: "If you are believers, then we are unbelievers." And they have a right to say so, for self-styled believers are often not so in reality. Many worship God because it is the fashion to do so or in order to deceive the world. How can such persons have any influence on atheists? Therefore, let the believer realize and have the faith that, if he is true to God, his neighbours will instinctively not be atheists. Do not let him be troubled about the whole world. Let us remember that atheists exist by the sufferance of God. How truly has it been said that those who worship God in name only are not believers, but those who do His will?

*To Whom Shall We Pray?*

**ATHEIST:** Do you know the God to whom you pray?

**Gandhiji:** No, I don't.

**Atheist:** To whom shall we pray then?

**Gandhiji:** To the God whom we do not know — we do not always know the person to whom we pray.

**Atheist:** Maybe, but the person to whom we pray is knowable.

**Gandhiji:** So is God; and since He is knowable, we search. It may take a billion years before we find Him. What does it matter? So, I say, even if you do not believe, you must continue to pray, i.e. search. "Help thou my unbelief" is a verse from the *Bible* to be remembered. But it is not right to ask such questions. You must have infinite patience and inward longing. Inward longing obviates all such questions. "Have faith and you will be whole" is another tip from the *Bible*.

**Atheist:** When I look around me, I say to myself: There must be one Creator, one God, and to Him I should pray.



*Gandhiji*: That again is reasoning. God is beyond reason. But I have nothing to say if your reason is enough to sustain you.<sup>8</sup>

God cannot be realized through intellect. Intellect can lead one to a certain extent and no further. It is a matter of faith and experience derived from that faith. One might rely on the experience of one's better, or else be satisfied with nothing less than personal experience. Full faith does not feel the want of experience.<sup>9</sup>

It is impossible that a thing essentially of the soul can ever be imparted through the intellect. It is just like trying to impart faith in God through the intellect. It cannot be, as it is essentially a matter of heart. Faith can be turned into knowledge by experience, and it can come only through the heart and not the intellect. The intellect, if anything, acts as a barrier in matters of faith.<sup>10</sup>

## CHAPTER VI

### FAITH Vs. REASON

**I** BELIEVE in faith, in things where reason has no place, e.g., the existence of God. No argument can move me from that faith, and like that little girl who repeated against all reason: 'Yet we are seven', I would like to repeat, on being baffled in argument by a very superior intellect: 'Yet there is God'.<sup>1</sup>

Reason has its place, only it must not usurp the heart. If you will go through any twenty-four hours of the life of the most reasoning man you know, you will find that most of his acts done during that time are done by feeling, not by reasoning. The moral is that reason once developed acts automatically and rejects what is superstitious or immoral if the heart is sound. Reason is a corrective and is in its place when it remains at the door ever watchful, never moving. Life is duty i.e., action. When this is reasoned away, reason has become a usurper and must be dethroned.<sup>2</sup>

Faith is not imparted like secular subjects. It is given through the language of the heart. If man has a living faith in him, it spreads its aroma like the rose its scent. Because of its invisibility, the extent of its influence is far wider than that of the visible beauty of the colour of the petals.<sup>3</sup>

Faith does not admit of telling. It has to be lived and then it becomes self-propagating.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Limitations of Reason*

EXPERIENCE has humbled me enough to let me realize the specific limitations of reason. Just as matter misplaced becomes dirt, reason misused becomes lunacy. If we would but render unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's, all would be well.

Rationalists are admirable beings, rationalism is a hideous monster when it claims for itself omnipotence. Attribution of omnipotence to reason is as bad a piece of idolatry as is worship of stock and stone believing it to be God.

Who has reasoned out the use of prayer? Its use is felt after practice. Such is the world's testimony. Cardinal Newman never surrendered his reason, but he yielded a better place to prayer when he humbly sang: 'One step enough for me'. Shankara was a prince among reasoners. There is hardly anything in the world's literature to surpass Shankara's rationalism. But he yielded the first place to prayer and faith.

I do not know a single rationalist who has never done anything in simple faith and has based every one of his acts on reason. But we all know millions of human beings, living their more or less orderly lives because of their childlike faith in the Maker of us all. That very faith is a prayer.

The ancients did not delete from their lives the predominant function of faith and prayer. Works without faith and prayer are like an artificial flower that has no fragrance. I plead not for the suppression of reason, but for a due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason itself.<sup>5</sup>

Faith only begins where reason stops.<sup>6</sup>

### *Faith Vs. Reason*

AN M.B.B.S. from Mandalay sends a string of questions of which the first is :

"You once expressed your opinion that faith begins where reason ends. Then I expect you will call it faith, if a person believes in a thing for which he can give no reasons. Is it not then clear that faith is believing unreasonably? Do you think it is truth or

justice if anybody believed in anything unreasonable? I think it is folly to believe in that way. I do not know what your barrister mind will call it. If you think like me, I hope you will call faith as nothing but folly."

If the worthy doctor will excuse my saying so, there is in this question a clear failure to understand my meaning. That which is beyond reason is surely not unreasonable. Unreasonable belief is blind faith and is often superstition. To ask anybody to believe without proof what is capable of proof would be unreasonable, as, for instance, asking an intelligent person to believe without proof that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles. But for an experienced person to ask another to believe without being able to prove that there is God, is humbly to confess his limitations and to ask another to accept in faith the statement of his experience. It is merely a question of that person's credibility. In ordinary matters of life, we accept in faith the word of persons on whom we choose to rely, although we are often cheated. Why may we not then in matters of life and death accept the testimony of sages all the world over, that there is God and that He is to be seen by following Truth and Innocence (non-violence)? It is at least as reasonable for me to ask my correspondent to have that faith in this universal testimony, as it would be for him to ask me to take his medicine in faith even though many a medicine-man might have failed me. I make bold to say that without faith this world would come to naught in a moment. True faith is appropriation of the reasoned experience of people whom we believe to have lived a life purified by prayer and penance. Belief, therefore, in prophets or incarnations who have lived in remote ages, is not an idle superstition but a satisfaction of an inmost spiritual want. The formula, therefore, I have humbly



suggested for guidance is rejection of every demand for faith where a matter is capable of present proof, and unquestioned acceptance on faith of that which is itself incapable of proof except through personal experience.<sup>7</sup>

*Reason—a Poor Thing*

REASON is a poor thing in the midst of temptations. Faith alone can save us. Reason *appears* to be on the side of those who indulge in drink and free love. The fact is that reason is blurred on such occasions. It follows the instinct. Do not lawyers ranged on opposite sides make reason appear to be on their side? And yet one of them must be wrong, or it may be that both are. Hence faith in the rightness of one's moral position is the only bulwark against the attack of reason.

There is no such thing as absolute morality for all times. But there is a relative morality which is absolute enough for imperfect mortals that we are. Thus, it is absolutely immoral to drink spirituous liquors except as medicine, in medicinal doses and under medical advice. Similarly, it is absolutely wrong to see lustfully any woman other than one's wife. Both these positions have been proved by cold reason. Counter-arguments have always been advanced. They have been advanced against the very existence of God—the Sum of all that Is. Faith that transcends reason is our only Rock of Ages. My faith has saved me and is still saving me from pitfalls. It has never betrayed me. It has never been known to betray anyone.<sup>8</sup>

## CHAPTER VII

### SEEING GOD FACE TO FACE

“CAN one see God face to face\* while still living?” This question never worries a liver of the *Gita* life, for he is entitled only to strive and must not bother about the consequences. Still, I am inclined to think that perfect realization of the Supreme is impossible so long as one is subject to the limitations of life. He might reach the door, but cannot enter as he still bears his body like chains. However, he should be ever conscious of pain due to separation from God; if this pain is not felt he will be negligent in his effort and might even stop it altogether. The pain must not cause despondency, but must be the spring of hope everlasting and a spur to stronger effort. Remember the *Gita* promise, that the least little effort never goes in vain.† Therefore, the pain of separation too must be a source of joy for the aspirant, as he is confident that he is bound to reach his goal sooner or later.<sup>1</sup>

No one can see God face to face who has aught of the 'I' in him. He must become a cypher if he would see God. Who shall dare say in this storm-tossed Universe, 'I have won.'? God triumphs in us, never we.<sup>2</sup>

Seeing God face to face is to feel that He is enthroned in our hearts, even as a child feels a mother's affection without needing any demonstration. Does a child reason out the existence of a mother's love? Can he prove it to

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\* "In the phrase 'seeing God face to face', 'face to face' is not to be taken literally. It is a matter of decided feeling. God is formless. He can, therefore, only be seen by spiritual sight."

— *Selected Letters* : p. 43.

† "Success lies in the effort itself. God has promised that effort for the good never goes fruitless and all of us have had experience of this to some extent."

— *Selected Letters* : p. 52.

others? He triumphantly declares: 'It is.' So must it be with the existence of God. He defies reason. But He is experienced. Let us not reject the experience of Tulsidas, Chaitanya, Ramdas and a host of other spiritual teachers, even as we do not reject that of mundane teachers.<sup>3</sup>

### *My Hope and Aspiration*

I HOPE some day to see God—Truth—face to face.<sup>4</sup>

I want to see God face to face. God I know is Truth. For me, the only certain means of knowing God is Non-violence—*Ahimsa*—Love.<sup>5</sup>

'Have you seen God face to face?'

I have not seen God face to face. If I had, I would have no need to be speaking to you. My thought would be potent enough to render speech and action on my part unnecessary. But I have an undying faith in the existence of God. Millions all over the world share this faith with me. The most learned cannot shake the faith of the illiterate millions. The *bhajan* sung during the prayer describes the way to see God face to face. The poet asks the aspirant to shed anger and desire and to be indifferent to praise or blame, if he expects to reach the blessed state.<sup>6</sup>

### *An Elucidation*

Q. The other day you admitted that you had not seen God face to face. In the Preface to *My Experiments with Truth*, you have stated that you have seen God in the embodiment of Truth from a far distance. The two statements appear to be incompatible. Kindly elucidate for proper understanding.

A. There is a big gulf between 'seeing God face to face' and 'seeing Him in the embodiment of Truth from a far distance'. In my opinion, the two statements are not only not incompatible, but each explains the other. We

see the Himalayas from a very great distance and, when we are on the top, we have seen the Himalayas face to face. Millions can see them from hundreds of miles if they are within the range of that seeing distance; but few, having arrived at the top after years of travel, see them face to face. This does not seem to need elucidation.<sup>7</sup>



## CHAPTER VIII

### GOD-REALIZATION

MAN'S ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities—social, political, religious—have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour, simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done through one's country. I am part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert, that I must concentrate on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.<sup>1</sup>

To realize God is to see Him in all that lives, i.e., to realize our oneness with all creation.<sup>2</sup>

I recognize no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize His presence; I do. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God through the service of these millions.<sup>3</sup>

I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in every one, be he a Hindu, *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, *Shudra*, or a *Panchama*, a Mussalman, a Parsi, a Christian,—man or woman.<sup>4</sup>

My creed is service of God, therefore, of humanity. I can neither serve God nor humanity, if as an Indian I do not serve India, and as a Hindu I do not serve the Indian Mussalmans. Voluntary service means pure love.<sup>5</sup>

Man's highest endeavour lies in trying to find God. He cannot be found in temples or idols or places of

worship built by man's hands, nor can He be found by abstinences. God can be found only through love, not earthly, but divine. That love was lived by Mirabai who saw God in everything. He was all in all to her.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Purpose of Life*

THE purpose of life is undoubtedly to know oneself. We cannot do it unless we learn to identify ourselves with all that lives. The sum-total of that life is God. Hence the necessity of realizing God living within every one of us. The instrument of this knowledge is boundless, selfless service.<sup>7</sup>

God takes and needs no personal service. He serves His creatures without demanding any service for Himself in return. He is unique in this as in many other things. Therefore, servants of God are to be known by the service they render to His creatures.<sup>8</sup>

### *Finding God Through the Spinning Wheel*

THE poet says that he who loses 'self' finds God. If we understand its significance, we really do not need anything more. This is what the spinning wheel teaches us. You might ask how it is possible to find God through the spinning wheel. The spinning wheel enables us to identify ourselves with the crores. The millionaires imagine that money can bring them anything in the world. But it is not so. At any moment death might come and snuff them out. Some are being stabbed daily, but losing one's life that way is not the same thing as shedding 'self'. One has to learn to efface self or the ego voluntarily and as a sacrifice in order to find God. The spinning wheel rules out exclusiveness. It stands for all, including the poorest. It, therefore, requires us to be humble and to cast away pride completely.

It holds the key to *Swaraj*. But can one spin for *Swaraj* and yet not be filled with subtle pride? If pride is

there, spinning won't bring one the *Swaraj* of the spirit or the realization of God.

When self is shed, the change will be reflected in our outward behaviour. It will show in the littlest of our little acts. The whole outlook on life will be changed. Everything we do, will be undertaken not for little self but for all.

The poet goes on to say, that to find God one need not go out anywhere. He resides in our hearts. But if we instal self or ego there, we dethrone "poor" God. I have here used the epithet 'poor' advisedly. For, although He is the King of Kings, Most High, Almighty, yet He is at the beck and call of anyone who has reduced himself to zero, and turns to Him in uttermost humility of spirit. Let us, then, become poor in spirit and find Him within ourselves.<sup>9</sup>

### *Service of God*

Q. Can there be any service without religion?

A. Why, service which has not the slightest touch of self in it, is itself the highest religion.

Q. But one must be devoted to someone?

A. Yes, to Truth. I am devoted to none but Truth, and I owe no discipline to anybody but Truth.

Q. But how is one to get inspiration from this general idea?

A. That means to say that you want a God who has form, Truth is too impersonal for you? Well, idolatry is embedded in human nature. But you may, if you like, worship God as Truth, if not Truth as God. God is Truth, but God is many other things also. That is why I prefer to say Truth is God. But you need not go into what may sound like mystic lore; you may simply worship what you find to be the Truth, for Truth is known relatively. Only, remember, that Truth is not one of the many qualities

that we name. It is the living embodiment of God, it is the only Life, and I identify Truth with fullest life, and that is how it becomes a concrete thing, for God is His whole Creation, the whole Existence, and service of all that exists—Truth—is service of God.<sup>10</sup>

Q. How can we serve God when we do not know God?

A. We may not know God, but we know His creation. Service of His creation is the service of God.\*

Q. But how can we serve the whole of God's creation?

A. We can but serve that part of God's creation which is nearest and best known to us. We can start with our next-door neighbour. We should not be content with keeping our courtyard clean; we should see that our neighbour's courtyard is also clean. We may serve our family, but may not sacrifice the village for the sake of the family. Our own honour lies in the preservation of that of our own village. But we must each of us understand our own limitations. Our capacity for service is automatically limited by our knowledge of the world in which we live. But let me put it in the simplest possible language. Let us think less of ourselves than our next-door neighbour. Dumping the refuse of our courtyard into that of our neighbour is no service of humanity, but disservice. Let us start with the service of our neighbours.<sup>11</sup>

### *An Unseen Power*

GOD is not a Power residing in the clouds. God is an Unseen Power residing within us and nearer to us than finger-nails to the flesh. There are many powers lying

\* "The only way to be nearer to God is to serve His creation. There can be no other meaning of God."

—From A Letter to Vidya Hingorani: Nov. 23, 1930.



hidden within us and we discover them by constant struggle. Even so may we find this Supreme Power, if we make diligent search with the fixed determination to find Him. One such way is the way of *Ahimsa*. It is so very necessary because God is in every one of us and, therefore, we have to identify ourselves with every human being without exception. This is called cohesion or attraction in scientific language. In the popular language, it is called Love. It binds us to one another and to God. *Ahimsa* and Love are one and the same thing.<sup>12</sup>

My God does not reside up above. He has to be realized on earth. He is here, within you, within me. He is omnipotent and omnipresent. You need not think of the world beyond. If we can do our duty here, the beyond will take care of itself.<sup>13</sup>

### *Vision of God or Truth*

WHAT is the Vision of the Truth or God? It does not mean seeing something with the physical eye or witnessing a miracle. Seeing God means realization of the fact that God abides in one's heart. The yearning must persist until one has attained this realization, and will vanish upon realization. Realization is the final fruit of constant effort. The human lover sacrifices his all for his beloved, but his sacrifice is fruitless inasmuch as it is offered for the sake of momentary pleasure. But the quest of Truth calls for even greater concentration than that of the human beloved. There is joy ineffable in store for the aspirant at the end of the quest. Still very few of us are as earnest as even the human lover. Such being the facts of the case, what is the use of complaining that the quest of Truth is an uphill task? The human beloved may be at a distance of several thousand miles; God is there in the tabernacle of the human heart, nearer to us than the finger-nails are to the fingers. But what is to be done

with a man who wanders all over the wide world in search of treasure which, as a matter of fact, is buried under his very feet?<sup>14</sup>

One who looks upon the Universe as various facets of God will certainly have the Beatific Vision. But what he sees will be a creation of his own imagination. A Christian who looks upon the Universe as God will see a Christ-like image. A man sees God as he worships Him. A Hindu will always draw fresh inspiration from the Eleventh Chapter (of the *Gita*); and if he is a devotee (*Bhakta*), he will see God as He has been there described. But what he sees will have no existence except in his own imagination. God is without form, but He assumes form for His devotee. That is His *Maya*, or poetry. The whole thing boils down to this: We have to see God even in the thief and the robber. If we can thus see God in him, he will give up his thievish propensities. All our knowledge and spiritual exercises are fruitless so long as we have not had this vision.<sup>15</sup>

### *How May We See God?*

"HOW may we see God?"

We cannot see God with these eyes. God is spirit without body and is, therefore, visible only to the eye of faith. If there are no evil thoughts troubling our mind and no fears but constant cheerfulness in our heart, that is an indication of God's presence in ourselves. Indeed, He is there at all times, but we fail to notice His presence as we have no faith, and thus undergo much suffering. When once we have cultivated real faith, calamities cease to upset us.

However, we cannot go nearer to God by physical acts, but by devotion and conduct inspired by such devotion. *Pranayama* and the like are an instrument of cleanliness and thus give us some peace of mind. That is all.<sup>16</sup>

*God is Good*

NOT in the same sense as X is good. X is comparatively good. He is more good than evil, but God is wholly good. There is no evil in Him. God made man in His own image. Unfortunately for us, man has fashioned Him in his own. This arrogation has landed mankind in a sea of troubles. God is the Supreme Alchemist. In His presence, all iron and dross turn into pure gold. Similarly does all evil turn into good.

Again, God lives but not as we. His creatures live but to die. But God is life. Therefore, goodness and all it connotes is not an attribute. Goodness is God. Goodness, conceived as apart from Him, is a lifeless thing and exists only whilst it is a paying policy. So are all morals. If they are to live in us, they must be considered and cultivated in their relation to God. We try to become good because we want to reach and realize God. All the dry ethics of the world turn to dust, because apart from God they are lifeless. Coming from God, they come with life in them. They become part of us and ennoble us.

Conversely, God conceived without Goodness is without life. We give Him life in our vain imaginings.<sup>17</sup>

*Has Man Created God?*

"GOD is a creation of man's imagination. It is not God who has created man, but man who has created God. Is this not true?"

I have taken this from a correspondent's letter. There is a semblance of truth in what he says. The writer has, however, unwittingly created the illusion by a play upon the two words "creation" and "God".

God Himself is both the Law and the Law-giver. The question of anyone creating Him, therefore, does not arise, least of all by an insignificant creature such as man. Man can build a dam, but he cannot create a river. He

can manufacture a chair, but it is beyond him to make the wood. He can, however, picture God in his mind in many ways. But how can man who is unable to create even a river or wood create God? That God has created man is, therefore, the pure truth. The contrary is an illusion. However, anyone may, if he likes, say that God is neither the doer nor the cause. Either is predictable of Him.<sup>18</sup>

### *What or Who is God?*

GOD is not a person. To affirm that He descends to earth every now and again in the form of a human being is a partial truth, which merely signifies that such a person lives near to God. Inasmuch as God is omnipresent, He dwells within every human being and all may, therefore, be said to be incarnations of Him. But this leads us nowhere. Rama, Krishna, etc., are called incarnations of God because we attribute divine qualities to them. In truth, they are creations of man's imagination. Whether they actually lived or not, does not affect the picture of them in men's mind. The Rama and Krishna of history often present difficulties which have to be overcome by all manner of arguments.

The truth is that God is the Force.\* He is the Essence of Life. He is pure and undefiled Consciousness. He is eternal. And yet, strangely enough, all are not able to derive either benefit from, or shelter in, the all-pervading Living Presence.

Electricity is a powerful force. Not all can benefit from it. It can only be produced by following certain

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\* "God is not a person. He is the All-pervading, All-powerful Spirit. Anyone who bears Him in his heart has access to a marvellous force of energy, comparable in its results to physical forces like steam or electricity, but much more subtle."



laws. It is a lifeless force. Man can utilize it if he labours hard enough to acquire the knowledge of its laws.

The Living Force, which we call God, can similarly be found if we know and follow His Law leading to the discovery of Him in us. But it is self-evident that to find out God's Law requires far harder labour. The Law may, in one word, be termed *Brahmacharya*. The straight way to cultivate *Brahmacharya* is *Ramanama*. I can say this from experience. Devotees and sages like Tulsidas have shown us this royal path.<sup>19</sup>

### *How To Attain God-Realization*

Q. Can a man who resorts to untruth for worldly purposes see God? Or, is the Beatific Vision possible for one who gives up all activities in order to be able to observe the Law of Truth?

A. One who resorts to untruth, with any end in view whatsoever and is full of likes and dislikes, can never attain the Supreme. Your second question deals with an impossibility. To tread the path of Truth and to eschew all activity—this is a contradiction in terms. If a man is not active, how can we say anything about the path he has taken? To tread the path of Truth implies an active life in the world of men. In the absence of such activity, there is no occasion for either pursuing or swerving from Truth. The *Gita* has made it clear that a man cannot remain inactive even for a single moment. The difference between one who is a devotee of God and another who is not, is that the former is active in the service of others, never gives up Truth in the midst of activity and gradually overcomes his likes and dislikes; while the other is active for selfish reasons and has no scruples whatever as regards the means he employs in order to achieve his selfish ends. This world is not something evil in itself, for only an active life in the world can

help us to attain the goal of God-realization. This activity must be directed to the good of others. Selfish activity is fit only to be condemned and should be given up.<sup>20</sup>

### *Conditions for Redemption*

THE orthodox conception of redemption is redemption in the life to come. What I want to tell you that redemption...is promised us here and now, if we fulfil the necessary conditions. They are, firstly, self-purification; and, secondly, obedience to the Law. It is vain, it is demoralizing to expect that in the life to come, God will vindicate His title as Redeemer by saving us, while we continue to carry the load of sin on our heads in this life. A businessman who lies and cheats his simple-minded, ignorant customers cannot hope to be saved.

It has been said that to one who is good, the whole world becomes good. That is true so far as the individual is concerned. But goodness becomes dynamic only when it is practised in the face of evil. If you return good for good only, it is a bargain and carries no merit; but if you return good for evil, it becomes a redeeming force. The evil ceases before it, and it goes on gathering volume and momentum like a snowball till it becomes irresistible.<sup>21</sup>

The *Gita* tells us that by sincerely meditating on Him in one's heart, one can attain *Moksha*. Meditation is waiting on God. Waiting on God means increasing purity.<sup>22</sup>

God can never be realized by one who is not pure of heart. Self-purification, therefore, must mean purification in all the walks of life. And purification being highly infectious, purification of oneself necessarily leads to the purification of one's surroundings.<sup>23</sup>

All the great religions of the world, however much they may differ, are absolutely one on this fundamental thing that no man or woman with an impure heart can

possibly appear before the Great White Throne.<sup>24</sup>

A man realizes the Supreme by becoming absolutely free from likes and dislikes and never otherwise. I hold that he who says that he has attained realization is far, far away from his destination. Realization is a matter of experience but does not lend itself to description in language.

I can live only in virtue of my faith in God. In my view, there is no God different from Truth. Truth is God.<sup>25</sup>

I think it is wrong to expect certainties in this world where all else but God, that is Truth, is an uncertainty. All that appears and happens about and around us is uncertain and transient. But there is one Supreme Being hidden therein as a Certainty, and one would be blessed if one would catch a glimpse of that Certainty and hitch one's waggon to it. The quest for that Truth is the *summum bonum* of life.<sup>26</sup>

## CHAPTER IX

### GOD IS TRUTH: TRUTH IS GOD

**I**CLAIM to be a votary of Truth from my childhood. It was the most natural thing to me. My prayerful search gave me the revealing maxim 'Truth is God' instead of the usual one 'God is Truth'. That maxim enables me to see God face to face as it were. I feel Him pervade every fibre of my being<sup>1</sup>

Instead of saying that God is Truth, I say that Truth is God. This was not always clear to me. I realized it only some years ago, but my conduct has been unconsciously based on that realization. I have known God only as Truth. There was a time when I had doubts about the existence of God, but I never doubted the existence of Truth. This Truth is not something material but Pure Intelligence. It rules over the Universe; therefore, it is *Ishwara* (The Lord)... This is for me almost a matter of experience. I say 'almost', because I have not seen Truth face to face. I have had only glimpses of it. But my faith is indomitable.<sup>2</sup>

If God is equated with Truth, we can see Him face to face.<sup>3</sup>

Denial of God we have known. Denial of Truth we have not known. The most ignorant among mankind have some truth in them. We are all sparks of Truth. The sum total of those sparks is indescribable, as-yet-Unknown Truth, which is God.<sup>4</sup>

#### *God and His Law*

FOR the last few years I have been saying that 'Truth is God' instead of 'God is Truth'. The former statement is more consonant with facts, for in this world there is nothing besides Truth. Truth here should be understood in a wide sense. It is full of intelligence. God as Truth



and His Law are not different but one and the same; therefore, it also is full of intelligence. Indeed, it is all the same whether we say that the Universe is a function of Truth, or that it is a function of Law. This Truth is charged with infinite power. In the language of the *Gita*, Chapter 10, the Universe is sustained by a fraction of it. Therefore, if you replace the word 'God' by the word 'Truth', wherever it occurs, you will have some idea of what I mean.<sup>5</sup>

### *The Sovereign Principle*

FOR me Truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. This Truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also; and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God. There are innumerable definitions of God, because His manifestations are innumerable. They overwhelm me with wonder and awe and, for a moment, stun me. But I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. Even if the sacrifice demanded be my very life, I hope I may be prepared to give it. But as long as I have not realized this Absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it. That relative truth must, meanwhile, be my beacon, my shield and buckler.

Though this path is strait and narrow and sharp as the razor's edge, for me it has been the quickest and easiest. Even my Himalayan blunders have seemed trifling to me because I have kept strictly to this path. For, the path has saved me from coming to grief, and I have gone forward according to my light. Often, in my progress, I have had faint glimpses of the Absolute Truth, God, and daily the conviction is growing upon me that

He alone is real and all else is unreal.

The further conviction has been growing upon me that whatever is possible for me is possible even for a child, and I have found sound reasons for saying so. The instruments for the quest of Truth are as simple as they are difficult. They may appear quite impossible to an arrogant person, and quite possible to an innocent child. The seeker after Truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after Truth should so humble himself that even the dust could crush him. Only then, and not till then, will he have a glimpse of Truth.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Spirit of Truth*

MY uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth . . . The little fleeting glimpses that I have been able to have of Truth can hardly convey an idea of the indescribable lustre of Truth, a million times more intense than that of the Sun we daily see with our eyes. In fact, what I have caught is only the faintest glimmer of that Mighty Effulgence. But this much I can say with assurance, as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realization of *Ahimsa*.

To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.<sup>7</sup>

### *In Search for Truth*

AS I proceed in my search for Truth, it grows upon me

that Truth comprehends everything. It is not in *Ahimsa*, but *Ahimsa* is in it. What is perceived by a pure heart and intellect is truth for that moment. Cling to it, and it enables one to reach pure Truth. There is no question there of a divided duty. But often enough it is difficult to decide what is *Ahimsa*. For instance, the use of disinfectants is *himsa*, and yet we cannot do without it. We have to live a life of *Ahimsa* in the midst of a world of *himsa*, and that is possible only if we cling to Truth. That is how I deduce *Ahimsa* from Truth.

Out of Truth emanate love, tenderness, humility. A votary of Truth has to be humble as the dust. His humility increases with his observance of Truth. I see this every moment of my life. I have a much vividder sense of Truth and of my own littleness than I had a year ago. The wonderful implication of the great truth '*Brahma satyam jaganmithya*' (*Brahma* is real, all else unreal) grows on me from day to day. It teaches us patience. This will purge us of harshness and add to our tolerance. It will make us magnify the mole-hills of our errors into mountains, and minimize the mountains of others' errors into mole-hills. The body persists because of egoism. The utter extinction of the body or egoism is *Moksha*. He who has achieved this will be the very image of Truth, or one may call it *Brahman*.

Therefore, the loving name of God is *Dasanudas* (Servant of servants). Wife, children, friends, possessions—all should be held subservient to Truth. Each one of these should be sacrificed in search for Truth.<sup>8</sup>

### *Truth is God*

TRUTH is God—nothing else, nothing less. The nearest word answering to Truth in Sanskrit is *Sat*. *Sat* means being. God alone is *Sat*. He alone is, nothing and no one else is. Everything else is illusion. *Satya* means *Sat*. Truth

alone is in the world, nothing else is. This is easy enough to understand. Then, what is Truth? For us, it is a relative term. Absolute Truth is God. Whatever we understand by God is implied in Truth. It alone really sustains us. For a time, many other things may sustain us; but this alone sustains us for all time. Truth gives perennial joy.<sup>9</sup>

Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *Sat* or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact, it is more correct to say that 'Truth is God', than to say that 'God is Truth'. But as we cannot do without a ruler or a general, such names of God as 'King of Kings' or the 'Almighty' are and will remain generally current. On deeper thinking, however, it will be realized that *Sat* or *Satya* is the only correct and fully significant name for God.

And where there is Truth, there also is knowledge which is true. Where there is no Truth, there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word *Chit* or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where there is true knowledge, there is always bliss (*Anand*). There sorrow has no place. And even as Truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as *Sat-Chit-Anand*, One who combines in Himself Truth, Knowledge and Bliss.<sup>10</sup>

It is a fine combination. The three together make one word. Truth is knowledge also. It is Life. You feel vitality in you when you have got Truth in you. Again, it gives Bliss. It is a permanent thing of which you cannot be robbed. You may be sent to the gallows, or put to torture, but if you have Truth in you, you will experience an inner joy.<sup>11</sup>

Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centred in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When once



this stage in the pilgrim's progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But, without Truth, it is impossible to observe any principles or rules in life.

Generally speaking, observation of the Law of Truth is understood merely to mean that we must speak the truth. But we should understand the word '*Satya*' or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action. To the man who has realized this Truth in its fullness, nothing else remains to be known because all knowledge is necessarily included in it. What is not included in it is not Truth, and so not true knowledge. If we once learn how to apply this never-failing test of Truth, we will at once be able to find out what is worth doing, what is worth seeing, what is worth reading.

But how is one to realize this Truth, which may be likened to the Philosopher's Stone or the Cow of Plenty? By single-minded devotion (*abhayasa*) and indifference to all other interests in life (*vairagya*)—replies the *Bhagavad Gita*. In spite, however, of such devotion, what may appear as truth to one person will often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker. Where there is honest effort, it will be realized that what appear to be different truths are like the countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree. Does not God Himself appear to different individuals in different aspects? Yet we know that He is one. But Truth is the right designation of God.

Hence, there is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his lights. Indeed, it is his duty to do so. Then, if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth, it will be automatically set right. For, the quest of Truth involves *tapas*—self-suffering, sometimes even unto death. There can be no place in it for

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even a trace of self-interest. In such selfless search for Truth, nobody can lose his bearings for long. Directly he takes to the wrong path he stumbles, and is thus re-directed to the right path. Therefore, the pursuit of Truth is true *Bhakti* (devotion). It is the path that leads to God. There is no place in it for cowardice, no place for defeat. It is the talisman by which death itself becomes the portal to Life Eternal.

In this connection, it would be well to ponder over the lives and examples of Harishchandra, Prahalad, Ramachandra, Imam Hasan and Imam Husain, the Christian saints, etc. How beautiful it would be, if all of us, young and old, men and women, devoted ourselves wholly to Truth in all that we might do in our waking hours, whether working, eating, drinking or playing, till dissolution of the body makes us one with Truth? God as Truth has been for me a treasure beyond price; may He be so to every one of us!<sup>12</sup>

### *Truth and God*

“WHY do you regard God as Truth?”

You have asked me why I consider that God is Truth. In my early youth, I was taught to repeat what in Hindu scriptures are known as one thousand names of God. But these one thousand names of God were by no means exhaustive. We believe—and I think it is the truth—that God has as many names as there are creatures and, therefore, we also say that God is nameless; and since God has many forms, we also consider Him formless; and since He speaks to us through many tongues, we consider Him to be speechless; and so on. And so, when I came to study Islam, I found that Islam, too, had many names for God. I would say with those who say God is Love, God is Love. But deep down in me I used to say that



though God may be God, God is Truth, above all.\* If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that, for myself, God is Truth. But, two years ago, I went a step further and said that Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz., that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to that conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth, which began nearly fifty years ago. I, then, found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. But I also found that love has many meanings in the English language at least, and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degrading thing also. I found, too, that love in the sense of *Ahimsa* had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and not even atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But, in their passion for discovering truth, the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God—from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say that God is Truth, I should say that Truth is God. I recall the name of Charles Bradlaugh who delighted to call himself an atheist, but, knowing as I do something of him, I would never regard him as an atheist. I would call him a God-fearing man, though I know that he would reject the claim. His face would redden if I would say that

\*Q. 'God is Truth' and 'God is Love'—do these mean anything more than that 'God is truthful' and 'God is loving'?

A. In 'God is Truth', it certainly does not mean *is equal to*. nor does the proposition merely mean 'God is truthful'. Truth is not a mere attribute of God, but He is That. He is nothing if He is not That. Truth in Sanskrit means *Sat*. *Sat* means *Is*. Therefore, the more truthful we are, the nearer we are to God. We are only to the extent that we are truthful.

— *The Diary of Mahadevi Desai* : p. 218.

"Mr. Bradlaugh, you are a Truth-fearing man, and not a God-fearing man." I would automatically disarm his criticism by saying that Truth is God, as I have disarmed criticisms of many a young man. Add to this the great difficulty that millions have taken the name of God and in His name committed nameless atrocities. Not that scientists very often do not commit cruelties in the name of truth. I know how in the name of truth and science inhuman cruelties are perpetrated on animals when men perform vivisection. There are thus a number of difficulties in the way, no matter how you describe God. But the human mind is a limited thing, and you have to labour under limitations when you think of a being or entity who is beyond the power of man to grasp. And, then, we have another thing in Hindu philosophy, *viz.*, God alone is and nothing else exists, and the same truth you find emphasized and exemplified in the *Kalma* of Islam. There you find is clearly stated—that God alone is and nothing else exists. In fact, the Sanskrit word for Truth is a word which literally means that which exists—*Sat*. For these and several other reasons that I can give you, I have come to the conclusion that the definition—Truth is God—gives me the greatest satisfaction. And when you want to find Truth as God, the only inevitable means is Love, *i.e.*, non-violence; and since I believe that ultimately the means and end are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that God is Love.

"What then is Truth?"

A difficult question; but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you. How, then, you ask, different people think of different and contrary truths? Well, seeing that the human mind works through innumerable media and that the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another, and

hence those who have made these experiments have come to the conclusion that there are certain conditions to be observed in making those experiments. Just as for conducting scientific experiments there is an indispensable scientific course of instruction, in the same way strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to make experiments in the spiritual realm. Everyone should, therefore, realize his limitations before he speaks of his Inner Voice. Therefore, we have the belief based upon experience, that those who would make individual search after Truth as God, must go through several vows as, for instance, the vow of Truth, the vow of *Brahmacharya* (purity), for you cannot possibly divide your love for Truth and God with anything else—the vow of non-violence, of poverty and non-possession. Unless you impose on yourselves the five vows, you may not embark on the experiment at all. There are several other conditions prescribed, but I must not take you through all of them. Suffice it to say that those who have made these experiments know that it is not proper for everyone to claim to hear the voice of conscience, and it is because we have at the present moment everybody claiming the right of conscience, without going through any discipline whatsoever, that there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world. All that I can, in true humility, present to you is that Truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth, you must reduce yourself to a zero.\* Further than this I cannot go along this fascinating path.<sup>13</sup>

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\*Q. What is the meaning of reducing ourselves to zero ?

A. It means to be the last in receiving good things, to serve everyone, not to expect gratitude and to be the first in suffering.

— *The Diary of Mahadev Desai* : p. 211.

*The Only Comprehensive Attribute*

Q. What do you mean when you say that Truth is God?

A. I say that Truth is God not because God is without form and so is Truth, but because Truth is the only comprehensive attribute of God. Other attributes are only partial expressions of the Reality that is God. The Gujarati word *Ishwara* (the Lord) is also a descriptive epithet of God, but as it literally means ruler, it sounds quite insipid. Thinking of God as the King of Kings does not satisfy the intellect. Such a line of thought may generate a kind of fear in our minds, so that we are afraid of committing sin and are encouraged in doing meritorious deeds. But merit acquired out of fear almost ceases to be merit. Let us do good for its own sake, and not in order to win a reward. Pondering over the matter like this, I found that 'God is Truth' is an incomplete sentence. 'Truth is God' is the fullest expression of our meaning, in so far as it can be set forth in human speech. We arrive at the same conclusion if we consider the etymology of the word *Satya* (Truth), which is derived from *Sat*. *Sat* means eternal. That which exists at all times is Truth. It alone is, everything else is not. But while we learn to recognize God as Truth, we must not allow our faith to weaken. On the other hand, it should grow stronger. Such, at any rate, is my experience. By looking upon Truth as God, we steer clear of quite a number of dangers. We lose all interest in seeing or hearing about miracles. Seeing God is difficult to understand; but seeing Truth presents no such difficulty. Seeing Truth is indeed a hard task, but as we approach nearer and nearer to Truth, we catch a glimpse of the God of Truth, so that we hope to have a full view in His good time and our faith also burns brighter and brighter.<sup>14</sup>



*The Eternal Truth*

Q. How to reconcile your doctrine that 'Truth is God' with the precept that we should do everything with a faith in God, being wholly dependent upon and inspired by Him? The following occurs in the *Ashram Observances in Action* written by you :

"A man of faith will conduct such movements as are suggested to him by God with what money God sends down to him. God does not let us see or know that He Himself does anything. He inspires men and carries out His designs through them."

Is it possible to replace God with Truth wherever God occurs in this passage? How can we say that Truth does something, inspires men, suggests or conducts movements?

A. We can certainly say that. Truth here must be taken not in a narrow but a wide sense, *i.e.*, that which is, is eternal. Faith in God means a realization that it rules everything. *Ishwara* (the Lord) is a current word, which we have, therefore, accepted; otherwise that word derived from the root *Ish* (to rule) is inferior, in my opinion, to *Satya* (Truth). The Eternal Truth certainly can be said to conduct all movements and to inspire men. Munshi \* asked me what *Ishwara* means in ईश्वर प्रणिधानात् वा. I said it meant Truth. Some commentators hold that those words are superfluous and put down by Patanjali only in order not to come into conflict with current dogma. I do not agree. I do not think an author like Patanjali would use a single unnecessary word. I cannot say if he had my meaning of God in mind. But taking God in that sense, we find that these two words are indispensable.<sup>15</sup>

*Truth Has No Form*

TRUTH has no form. Therefore, every one will form

\* K. M. Munshi.

such an idea or image of Truth as appeals to him, and there will be as many images of Truth as there are men. These will all be true as long as they last. For, they enable a man to obtain everything he wants. As a matter of fact, names such as *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, *Ishwara*, *Bhagavan* are either meaningless or at least not significant enough; whereas *Satya* (Truth) is the perfect name for God. If someone says he will die for God's sake, he cannot make plain to others what he means, and people who hear him say so will hardly understand it. On the other hand, one who says he will die for Truth knows what he means, and his words will be generally understood by those who hear him.<sup>16</sup>

### *Truth Resides in Human Heart*

I NEED not say anything more about Truth. As regards God, it is difficult to define Him; but the definition of Truth is deposited in every human heart. Truth is that which you believe to be true at this moment, and that is your God. If a man worships this relative truth, he is sure to attain the Absolute Truth, *i.e.*, God, in course of time. The same doctrine is taught in the *Vedas*.<sup>17</sup>

No one has a monopoly of truth. All truth represented by imperfect humans that we are is relative. We can each act according to our lights. God alone knows the reality.<sup>18</sup>

God alone knows Absolute Truth. Therefore, I have often said, Truth is God. It follows that man, a finite being, cannot know Absolute Truth.<sup>19</sup>

Nobody in this world possesses Absolute Truth. This is God's attribute alone. Relative truth is all we know. Therefore, we can only follow the Truth as we see it. Such pursuit of Truth cannot lead anyone astray.<sup>20</sup>

It is not given to man to know the whole Truth. His duty lies in living up to the Truth as he sees it, and, in

doing so, to resort to the purest means, *i.e.*, to non-violence. Truth is not to be found in books. Truth resides in every human heart, and one has to search for it there, and to be guided by Truth as he sees it. But no one has a right to coerce others to act according to his own view of Truth.<sup>21</sup>

### *Convertible Terms*

FOR me, God and Truth are convertible terms and if anyone told me that God was a God of untruth or a God of torture, I would decline to worship Him.<sup>22</sup>

*Ahimsa* and Truth are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. *Ahimsa* is my God, and Truth is my God. When I look for *Ahimsa*, Truth says : 'Find it out through me'. When I look for Truth, *Ahimsa* says : 'Find it out through me'.<sup>23</sup>

There is one thing which is even simpler, but which may possibly be difficult for you to understand. But that has been my Pole Star all along during life's journey—the conviction that Truth is God and untruth a denial of Him.<sup>24</sup>

Truth is my God. Non-violence is the means of realizing Him.<sup>25</sup>

God *is*, even though the whole world deny Him. Truth *stands*, even if there be no public support. It is self-sustained.

### *Quest of Truth*

TRUTH is not fulfilled by mere abstinence from telling or practising an untruth in ordinary relations with fellow-men. But Truth is God, the one and only Reality. All other observances take their rise from the quest for, and the worship of, Truth. Worshippers of Truth must not resort to untruth, even for what they may believe to be the good of the country, and they may be required, like

Prahlad, civilly to disobey even the orders of parents and elders in virtue of their paramount loyalty to Truth.<sup>27</sup>

Truth is made of sterner stuff, and it must be held superior to any life or lives, be they ever so precious. It must live even if a million lives have to be sacrificed.<sup>28</sup>

In the march towards Truth, anger, selfishness, hatred etc., naturally give way, for otherwise Truth would be impossible to attain. A man who is swayed by passions may have good enough intentions, may be truthful in word, but he will never find the Truth. A successful search for Truth means complete deliverance from the dual throng of love and hate, happiness and misery, etc.<sup>29</sup>

### *God or No God*

Q. Don't you think that a preconceived idea of a God, Truth or Reality might colour the whole trend of our search and hence be a great impediment and may defeat the very purpose of our life? For example, you take certain moral truths as fundamental. But we are in search and as long as we have not found the Reality, how can we boast or assert that a certain rule of morality is the Truth, or it alone is going to help us in our search?

A. No search is possible without some workable assumptions. If we grant nothing, we find nothing. Ever since its commencement, the world—the wise and the foolish included—has proceeded upon the assumption that, if we are, God is and that, if God is not, we are not. And since belief in God is co-existent with the humankind, existence of God is treated as a fact more definite than the fact that the Sun is.

This living faith has solved the largest number of puzzles of life. It has alleviated our misery. It sustains us in life, it is our one solace in death. The very search for Truth becomes interesting, worthwhile, because of this belief.



But search for Truth is search for God. Truth is God. God is, because Truth is. We embark upon the search, because we believe that there is Truth and that It can be found by diligent search and meticulous observance of the well-known and well-tried rules of the search. There is no record in history of the failure of such search. Even the atheists who have pretended to disbelieve in God have believed in Truth. The trick they have performed is that of giving God another, not a new, name. His names are legion. Truth is the crown of them all.

What is true of God, is true, though in a less degree, of the assumption of the truth of some fundamental moralities. As a matter of fact, they are implied in the belief in God or Truth. Departure from these has landed the truants in endless misery. Difficulty of practice should not be confused with disbelief. A Himalayan expedition has its prescribed conditions of success. Difficulty of fulfilling the conditions does not make the expedition impossible. It only adds interest and zest to the search. Well, this expedition in search of God or Truth is infinitely more than numberless Himalayan expeditions and, therefore, much more interesting. If we have no zest for it, it is because of the weakness of our faith. What we see with our physical eyes is more real to us than the only Reality. We know that appearances are deceptive. Any yet we treat trivialities as realities. To see the trivialities as such is half the battle won. It constitutes more than half the search after Truth or God. Unless we disengage ourselves from trivialities, we have not even the leisure for the great search, or is it to be reserved for our leisure hours P<sup>30</sup>

## CHAPTER X

### THE INNER VOICE

**T**HERE are moments in your life when you must act, even though you cannot carry your best friends with you. The 'still small voice' within you must always be the final arbiter when there is a conflict of duty.<sup>1</sup>

I can but do my duty. A leader is useless when he acts against the promptings of his own conscience, surrounded as he must be by people holding all kinds of views. He will drift like an anchorless ship, if he has not the Inner Voice to hold him firm and guide him. Above all, I can easily put up with the denial of the world, but any denial by me of my God is unthinkable.<sup>2</sup>

I have no special revelation of God's will. My firm belief is that He reveals Himself daily to every human being, but we shut our ears to the 'still small voice'. We shut our eyes to the Pillar of Fire in front of us. I *realize* His omnipresence.<sup>3</sup>

Rightly or wrongly, I know that I have no other resource than the assistance of God in every conceivable difficulty, and I would like it to be believed that what may appear to be inexplicable actions of mine are really due to inner promptings.

It may be a product of my heated imagination. If it is so, I prize that imagination as it has served me for a chequered life extending over a period of now over fifty-five years, because I learned to rely consciously upon God before I was fifteen years old.<sup>4</sup>

The only tyrant I accept in this world is the 'still small voice' within.<sup>5</sup>

I shall lose my usefulness the moment I stifle the 'still small voice' within.<sup>6</sup>

This ability to hear and obey the Inner Voice gives

me whatever power I may have, and has enabled me to render some little service to the country. You will not have me at this time of my life to change my course and listen to any other voice but the Inner.<sup>7</sup>

### *A Question*

Q. How do you act according to the dictates of the Inner Voice, while you believe that Truth is God and there is no Creator?

A. The question betrays misunderstanding of my attitude. I say Truth is God. Therefore, Truth is the Creator. But 'Creator' here has not its usual meaning. Therefore, Truth both is and is not the Creator. But this is only to chop logic. In these matters, every one is free to believe what he thinks fit; for no one has perfect knowledge of God and even if a man knows something of Him, he cannot explain it to others. It is indeed true that I do not trust my intellect in arriving at decisions, and stay my hand until I hear the Inner Voice. I do not know if this is a mysterious power. I have never thought it necessary to analyze it. I believe and know that this is something beyond the intellect, and that is enough for me. I cannot offer any further explanation as I simply do not know.<sup>8</sup>

The Inner Voice defies description. But, sometimes, we do feel that we receive an inspiration from within.<sup>9</sup>

### *God's Voice or Devil's?*

THE 'Inner Voice' may mean a message from God or from the Devil, for both are wrestling in the human breast. Acts determine the nature of the voice.<sup>10</sup>

When a man speaks of the 'Inner Voice', the scientist says it is auto-suggestion. It is auto-suggestion indeed, because God is within. When he says it is auto-suggestion, to him it appears a thing to be despised and suppressed.

I, however, use the word 'auto-suggestion' in my own sense....When the scientist speaks of the Inner Voice being auto-suggestion, he means to say it is the Devil's voice. Maybe, it is. There are occasions when the Devil's voice speaks as God's Voice. God's Voice is not heard in the heart of every person. It is no matter of inherent right. You must undergo a course of training, if you want to hear the Voice of God. There are some rules laid down for it. If you followed them, the result would be infallible.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Voice of Conscience*

THERE are times when you have to obey a call which is the highest of all, *i.e.*, the Voice of Conscience, even though such obedience may cost many a bitter tear, nay, even more, separation from friends, from family, from the State to which you may belong, from all that you have held as dear as life itself. For, this obedience is the Law of our Being.<sup>12</sup>

A disciplined conscience is one to obey. It is the Voice of God. An undisciplined conscience leads to perdition, for the Devil speaks through it...."Not everyone that sayeth unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven shall enter that Kingdom."<sup>13</sup>

As we go forward in our journey of life, we have always problems coming up for decision, and they are the hardest when the voice of Satan nearly approaches the Voice of God. Only fullest trust (in God) and perfect purity and extreme humility can lead us to the right choice.<sup>14</sup>

### *'A Little Voice Within'*

THERE come to us moments in life when about some things we need no proof from without. A 'little voice'



within us tells us: 'You are on the right track, move neither to your left nor right, but keep to the strait and narrow way'.<sup>15</sup>

Having made a ceaseless effort to attain self-purification, I have developed some little capacity to hear correctly and clearly the 'still small voice' within.<sup>16</sup>

### *When the Inner Voice Speaks*

NOBODY has, to my knowledge, questioned the possibility of the Inner Voice speaking to some, and it is a gain to the world even if one person's claim to speak under the authority of the Inner Voice can be really sustained. Many may make the claim, but not all will be able to substantiate it. But it cannot and ought not to be suppressed for the sake of preventing false claimants. There is no danger whatsoever if many people could truthfully represent the Inner Voice. But, unfortunately, there is no remedy against hypocrisy. Virtue must not be suppressed because many will feign it. Men have always been found throughout the world claiming to speak for the Inner Voice. But no harm has yet overtaken the world through their short-lived activities. Before one is able to listen to that Voice, one has to go through a long and fairly severe course of training, and when it is the Inner Voice that speaks, it is unmistakable. The world cannot be successfully fooled for all time. There is, therefore, no danger of anarchy setting in because a humble man like me will not be suppressed and will dare to claim the authority of the Inner Voice, when he believes that he has heard it.<sup>17</sup>

My claim to hear the Voice of God is no new claim. Unfortunately, there is no way that I know of proving the claim except through results. God will not be God if He allowed Himself to be an object of proof by His creatures. But He does give His willing slave the power

to pass through the fiercest of ordeals. I have been a willing slave to this most exacting Master for more than half a century. His Voice has been increasingly audible, as years have rolled by. He has never forsaken me even in my darkest hour. He has saved me often against myself and left me not a vestige of independence. The greater the surrender to Him, the greater has been my joy.<sup>18</sup>

### *How I Heard the Voice*

THE first question that has puzzled many is about the Voice of God. What was it? What did I hear? Was there any person I saw? If not, how was the Voice conveyed to me? These are pertinent questions.

For me the Voice of God, of Conscience, of Truth, or the Inner Voice, or 'the still small voice' mean one and the same thing. I saw no form. I have never tried, for I have always believed God to be without form. But what I did hear was like a Voice from afar and yet quite near. It was as unmistakable as some human voice definitely speaking to me, and irresistible. I was not dreaming at the time I heard the Voice. The hearing of the Voice was preceded by a terrific struggle within me. Suddenly the Voice came upon me. I listened, made certain that it was the Voice, and the struggle ceased. I was calm. The determination was made accordingly, the date and the hour of the fast were fixed. Joy came over me. I felt refreshed.

Could I give any further evidence that it was truly the Voice that I heard and that it was not an echo of my own heated imagination? I have no further evidence to convince the sceptic. He is free to say that it was all self-delusion or hallucination. It may well have been so. I can offer no proof to the contrary. But I can say this—that not the unanimous verdict of the whole world against me could shake me from the belief that what I

heard was the true Voice of God.

But some think that God Himself is a creation of our own imagination. If that view holds good, then nothing is real, everything is of our own imagination. Even so, whilst my imagination dominates me, I can only act under its spell. Realist things are only relatively so. For me, the Voice was more real than my own existence. It has never failed me, and, for that matter, anyone else.

And everyone who wills can hear the Voice. It is within everyone. But like everything else, it requires previous and definite preparation.<sup>19</sup>

### *No Hallucination*

THERE is no question of hallucination. I have stated a simple scientific truth, thus to be tested by all who have the will and the patience to acquire the necessary qualifications, which are again incredibly simple to understand and easy enough to acquire where there is determination. I can only say : "You have to believe no one but yourselves. You must try to listen to the Inner Voice ; but if you won't have the expression 'Inner Voice', you may use the expression 'dictates of Reason', which you should obey ; and if you will not parade God, I have no doubt you will parade something else which in the end will prove to be God, for, fortunately, there is no one and nothing else but God in this Universe.

I would also submit that it is not every one claiming to act on the urge of the Inner Voice (who) has that urge. After all, like every other faculty, this faculty for listening to the 'still small voice' within requires previous effort and training, perhaps much greater than what is required for the acquisition of any other faculty ; and even if out of thousands of claimants only a few succeed in establishing their claim, it is well worth running the risk of having and tolerating doubtful claimants. A person

falsely claiming to act under Divine inspiration or the promptings of the Inner Voice, without having any such, will fare worse than the one falsely claiming to act under the authority of an earthly sovereign. Whereas the latter on being exposed will escape with injury to his body, the former may perish body and soul together. Charitable critics impute no fraud to me, but suggest that I am highly likely to be acting under some hallucination. The result for me, even then, will not be far different from what it would be if I was laying a false claim. A humble seeker that I claim to be has need to be most cautious and, to preserve the balance of mind, he has to reduce himself to zero before God will guide him. Let me not labour this point.<sup>20</sup>

### *Prophetic Vision*

Q. May I ask if you had anything like a prophetic vision ?

A. I do not know what you call a vision and what you will call prophetic. But let me give you an experience in my life. When I announced my fast of 21 days in jail, I had not reasoned about it. On retiring to bed the previous night, I had no notion that I was going to announce the next morning a fast of 21 days. But in the middle of the night, a Voice woke me up and said : "Go through a fast". "How many?" I asked. "21 days," was the answer. Now let me tell you that my mind was unprepared for it, disinclined for it. But the thing came to me as clearly as anything could be.

Let me tell you one thing more and I have done. Whatever striking things I have done in life, I have not done prompted by reason, but prompted by instinct—I would say God. Take the Dandi Salt March of 1930. I had not the ghost of a suspicion how the breach of the Salt Law would work itself out. Pandit Motilalji and



other friends were fretting and did not know what I would do; and I could tell them nothing as I myself knew nothing about it. But like a flash it came, and as you know it was enough to shake the country from one end to the other.

One last thing. Until the last day, I knew nothing about announcing the 6th of April, 1919, as a day of fasting and prayer. But I dreamt about it—there was no Voice or Vision as in 1930—and I felt it was just the thing to do. In the morning, I shared it with C. R.\* and announced it to the country, you know with what a wonderfully spontaneous response.<sup>21</sup>

### *Listening to God*

*MEMBERS of the Oxford Group:* You have always been listening to God. We feel that the solution of those problems which you have worked would be reached if all the millions of India would start listening to God. We feel we have a place in this plan and have, therefore, come to you in joy.

*Gandhiji:* How I wish I had the same enthusiasm that fires you. Of course, I have the experience in listening, not merely of trying to listen. The more I listen, the more I discover that I am still far away from God. While I can lay down rules, the observance of which is essential for proper listening, the Reality still escapes me. When we say we are listening to God and getting answers, though we say it truthfully, there is every possibility there of self-deception. I do not know that I am myself altogether free from self-deception. People sometimes ask me if I may not be mistaken, and I say to them: "Yes, very likely, what I say may be just picture of my elongated self before you".

This I know that all that glitters is not gold, and also

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\* C. Rajagopalachari,

that if a man has really heard the Voice of God, there is no sliding back, just as there is no forgetting it by one who has learnt to swim. The listening in must make people's lives daily richer and richer.

This listening in presupposes the fitness to listen, and the fitness is acquired after constant and patient striving and waiting on God. Shankaracharya has likened the process to the attempt to empty the sea by means of a drainer, small as the point of a blade of grass. This process thus necessarily is endless, being carried through birth after birth. And yet the effort has to be natural as breathing or the winking of the eyes, which processes happen without our knowing them. The effort coincides with the process of living. I commend to you this process of eternal striving which alone can take us face to face with God.<sup>22</sup>

## CHAPTER XI

### OURS IS BUT TO STRIVE

**M**AN plans but the success of his plans depends not on him but on the will of the Providence, which is the Supreme Arbiter of our destinies.<sup>1</sup>

Providence has its appointed hour for everything: We cannot command results; we can only strive.<sup>2</sup>

It is for man to put forth his best effort; the result can then be confidently placed in the hands of God, who only helps those who help themselves.<sup>3</sup>

There is no help like self-help. God helps those who help themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Success or failure is not in our hands. It is enough if we do our part well.... Ours is but to strive. In the end, it will be as He wishes.<sup>5</sup>

All have but to do their duty and leave the result in God's hands. Nothing happens without God's will. Ours is only to strive.<sup>6</sup>

But why should failure worry us? Success is in God's hands. Our failure should spur us to greater effort. That effort lies in being true to ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

Success depends not upon our high skill, it depends solely upon God. And He only helps the vigilant and the humble.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimate success always rests in the hands of God. And, if we realize that He is the Doer as also the Destroyer, why should we worry?<sup>9</sup>

God has not made us omniscient so that we may be able to see whether we have achieved ultimate success or not. The poet who realized this truth has left us the legacy of his immortal phrase: 'Immortal hope lies hidden in a thousand despairs'. All we have to do is to work without hope of fruit or reward.<sup>10</sup>

*We Must Do Our Duty*

A MAN who goes to do his duty only expects to be given strength by God to do his duty.<sup>11</sup>

One has to do one's duty and trust in God to make the way smooth. It is not that God necessarily and always removes hardships from one's path, but He does always enable one to bear them.<sup>12</sup>

I know that if we trust in God when we are weakest, somehow He makes us strong.<sup>13</sup>

'None of self and all of Thee' is a big prayer, biggest of its kind.<sup>14</sup>

Those who have faith in God must be patient and brave. There is no need to worry. Man has to do his duty. God has given him strength and discernment to do so. But result is always in God's hands.<sup>15</sup>

We should do our duty and leave the results in the hands of God and not in the hands of man. Man is supposed to be the maker of his own destiny. It is partly true. He can make his destiny only in so far as he is allowed by the Great Power which overrides all our intentions, all our plans and carries out His own plans.

I call that Great Power not by the name of *Allah*, not by the name of *Khuda* or God, but by the name of Truth. For me, Truth is God and Truth overrides all our plans. The whole truth is only embodied within the heart of that Great Power—Truth. I was taught from my early days to regard Truth as unapproachable—something that you cannot reach. A great Englishman taught me to believe that God is unknowable. He is knowable, but knowable only to the extent that our limited intellect allows.<sup>16</sup>

*'Lord, Give Me Faith'*

WE ought to have sufficient faith in us to be able to feel



that if we throw ourselves upon God's mercy untroubled by doubt or fear, it would be well with us.<sup>17</sup>

Doubt is invariably the result of want or weakness of faith. 'Lord, give me faith' is, therefore, my prayer day and night.<sup>18</sup>

That faith is of little value which can flourish only in fair weather. Faith, in order to be of any value, has to survive the severest trials. Your faith is a whited sepulchre if it cannot stand against the calumny of the whole world.<sup>19</sup>

I would ask you to keep your faith unsullied and untarnished in this age of scepticism and disbelief, and never to lose heart. For, remember that whilst it is given to man to strive, it is God alone who fulfils.<sup>20</sup>

## CHAPTER XII

### A TESTAMENT OF FAITH

I AM in the world feeling my way to light 'amid the encircling gloom.' I often err and miscalculate. My trust is solely in God. And I trust men only because I trust God. If I had no God to rely upon, I should be like Timon—a hater of my species.<sup>1</sup>

With my hand on my breast, I can say that not a minute in my life am I forgetful of God. For over twenty years, I have been doing everything that I have done as in the presence of God. But as I am a believer in God, as I never for a moment lose faith in Him, as I content myself with the joy and sorrow that He wills for me, I may feel helpless, but I never lose hope.<sup>2</sup>

I believe in the supreme power of God. I believe in Truth. I trust in God who knows how to confound the wisdom of men. He is a consummate *Jadugar* and I have placed myself in His hands. But He is a hard taskmaster. He would accept nothing short of the best you are capable of.<sup>3</sup>

I must say I do feel the presence of God—call Him Christ, call Him Krishna, call Him Rama. We have one thousand names to denote God, and if I did not feel the presence of God within me, I see so much of misery and disappointment every day that I would be a raving maniac and my destination would be the Hooghli.<sup>4</sup>

As days pass, I feel this Living Presence in every fibre of my veins. Without that feeling I should be demented. There are so many things that are calculated to disturb my peace of mind. So many events happen that would, without the realization of that Presence, shake me to the very foundation. But they pass me by, leaving me practically untouched.<sup>5</sup>

Q. Do you ever feel depressed?

A. This word is not to be found in my dictionary. I believe in an over-ruling Power as I believe I am talking to you just now. This may be unreal, but that *is* real. It dominates me and enables me to remain calm even in the midst of storm.<sup>6</sup>

In the midst of humiliation and so-called defeat and a tempestuous life, I am able to retain my peace because of an undying faith in God, translated as Truth. We can describe God as millions of things, but I have for myself adopted the simple formula—"Truth is God."<sup>7</sup>

### *My Darkest Hour*

Dr. Mott: What affords you the greatest hope and satisfaction?

Gandhiji: Faith in myself born of faith in God.

Dr. Mott: In moments when your heart may sink within you, you hark back to this faith in God?

Gandhiji: Yes. That is why I have always described myself as an irrepressible optimist.

Dr. Mott: So am I. Our difficulties are our salvation. They make us hark back to the living God.

Gandhiji: Yes. My difficulties have strengthened my faith which rises superior to every difficulty, and remains undimmed. My darkest hour was when I was in Bombay a few months ago. It was the hour of my temptation. Whilst I was asleep, I suddenly felt as though I wanted to see a woman. Well a man who had tried to rise superior to the sex-instinct for nearly 40 years was found to be intensely pained when he had this frightful experience. I ultimately conquered the feeling, but I was face to face with the blackest moment of my life and, if I had succumbed to it, it would have meant my absolute undoing. I was stirred to the depths because strength and peace come from a life of continence. Many Christian friends

are jealous of the peace I possess. It comes from God who has blessed me with the strength to battle against temptation.

*Dr. Mott* : I agree. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."<sup>8</sup>

### *God Appears in Action*

*Dr. Mott* : What has brought deepest satisfaction to your soul in difficulties and doubts and questionings ?

*Gandhiji* : Living faith in God.

*Dr. Mott* : When have you had indubitable manifestation of God in your life and experience ?

*Gandhiji* : I have seen and believe that God never appears to you in person, but in action which can only account for your deliverance in your darkest hour.

*Dr. Mott* : You mean things take place that cannot possibly happen apart from God.

*Gandhiji* : Yes. They happen suddenly and unawares. One experience stands quite distinctly in my memory. It relates to my 21 days' fast for the removal of untouchability. I had gone to sleep the night before without the slightest idea of having to declare a fast the next morning. At about 12 o'clock in the night, something wakes me suddenly, and some Voice—within or without, I cannot say—whispers : "Thou must go on a fast'.

"How many days ?" I ask.

The Voice again says : "Twenty-one days'.

"When does it begin ?" I ask.

It says : "You begin tomorrow'.

I went quietly off to sleep after making the decision. I did not tell anything to my companions until after the morning prayer. I placed into their hands a slip of paper announcing my decision and asking them not to argue with me, as the decision was irrevocable. Well, the doctors thought I would not survive the fast. But some-



thing within me said that I would, and that I must go forward. That kind of experience has never in my life happened before or after that date.

*Dr. Mott*: Now, you surely can't trace such a thing to an evil source?

*Gandhiji*: Surely not. I never have thought it was an error. If ever there was in my life a spiritual fast, it was this. There is something in denying satisfaction of the flesh. It is not possible to see God face to face unless you crucify the flesh. It is one thing to do what belongs to it as a temple of God, and it is another to deny it what belongs to it as to the body of flesh.<sup>9</sup>

### *Creative Experiences*

*Dr. Mott*: What have been the most creative experiences in your life? As you look back on your past, what, do you think, led you to believe in God when everything seemed to point to the contrary, when life, so to say, sprang from the ground, although it all looked impossible?

*Gandhiji*: Such experiences are a multitude. But as you put the question to me, I recall particularly one experience that changed the course of my life. That fell to my lot seven days after I had arrived in South Africa. I had gone there on a purely mundane and selfish mission. I was just a boy returned from England, wanting to make some money. Suddenly, the client who had taken me there asked me to go to Pretoria from Durban. It was not an easy journey. There was the railway journey as far as Charlestown and the coach to Johannesburg. On the train I had a first class ticket, but not a bed ticket. At Maritzburg, where the beddings were issued, the guard came and turned me out and asked me to go to the van compartment. I would not go and the train steamed away, leaving me shivering in the cold. Now, the creative experience comes there. I was afraid for my very life. I

entered the dark waiting room. There was a White man in the room. I was afraid of him. What was my duty, I asked myself. Should I go back to India, or should I go forward with God as my Helper, and face whatever was in store for me? I decided to stay and suffer. My active non-violence began from that date. And God put me through the test during that very journey. I was severely assaulted by the coachman for my moving from the seat he had given me.

*Dr. Mott:* The miseries, the slaps after slaps you received burnt into your soul.

*Gandhiji:* Yes, that was one of the richest experience of my life.<sup>10</sup>

God has always come to my rescue and blessed me with the courage needed for the occasion. The one occasion on which my courage was put to the severest test was on 13th January, 1897, when, acting against Mr. Escombe's advice not to disembark until dusk, I went ashore and faced the howling crowd determined on lynching me. I was surrounded by thousands of them, I was pelted with stones and kicked, but my courage did not fail me. I really cannot say how the courage came to me. But it did. God is great.<sup>11</sup>

### *My Faith in God*

I BELIEVE in God much more than I believe in the fact that you and I are alive and that I am speaking to you. I may give you an illustration of what I mean. In appearance, I am speaking to you and you are listening to me. In reality, your hearts and minds may be somewhere else. My heart also may be somewhere else and my mind may be in somethnig else. Then, my speaking or your listening would be a deception. Therefore, my speaking and your listening, though they are an appearance, may not be a reality. But my heart, word and deed are pledged

to the Being called God, *Allah*, *Rama* or *Krishna*. You will now easily recognize that it is true when I say that my belief in God is far more a reality to me than this meeting which I am addressing.<sup>12</sup>

I believe in an inscrutable Providence which presides over our destinies—call it God or by any other name you like.<sup>13</sup>

My trust is in God. We can but work and then be careful for nothing.<sup>14</sup>

### *God Alone is My Protector*

GOD alone is my protector. How can puny man, who is not sure even of his own tomorrow, presume to protect another? I am content to be under God's care. He may protect or destroy. I know He sometimes even destroys to protect.<sup>15</sup>

I can declare only in words that I own no protector but God. I do not know whether you will believe my statement. God alone knows the mind of a person; and the duty of a man of God is to act as he is directed by his Inner Voice. I claim that I act accordingly.<sup>16</sup>

God saves me so long as He wants me in this body. The moment His wants are satisfied, no precautions on my part will save me.<sup>17</sup>

Do not seek to protect me. The Most High is always there to protect us all. You may be sure that when my time is up, no one, not even the most renowned physician in the world, can stand between Him and me.<sup>18</sup>

If someone were to tell me, in order to avoid death, to retire to the Himalayas until the end of this year, I should not do so. For I know that death is inevitable, no matter what precautions man deludes himself with. I would like you to appreciate that I am one of the very few among the public men in India who know how to preserve their health. God knows what work to take out

of me. He will not permit me to live a moment longer than He needs me for His work.

I shall live on for a while, if God wants me. His work goes on, we come in only when and to the extent He wants us.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Less Care, the Better*

HE will take care, if we will but trust Him, not after the manner of those who will take all the care that money can procure and then trust. That we must take some care is true. But men of trust will not do violence to their own nature and go out of their way to take precautions and adopt remedies which ordinary men have no means to command. The formula, therefore, is the less care the better and no more than the least of us can procure by reasonable effort. Judged by this standard, the care I take of myself and that is being bestowed on me, is out of all proportion and inconsistent with my profession of faith in God. You will thus see that everything I do in this direction appears to me to be exaggerated and I often feel that it would be a great benefit if I could be neglected for a time. As it is, I am wrapped in cotton-wool.<sup>20</sup>

### *God's Will*

I HOLD the belief, even at the risk of being dubbed a fatalist, that not one hair of anyone's body can be touched without His will, and that when He has no use for our bodies, He defies all the care, attention and skill that money, prestige, patriotism, friendship and what not can summon to one's assistance. This belief does not mean that I do not want to take advantage of the assistance that medical friends all over India ungrudgingly and most generously render to me. I take that assistance gladly and faithfully. For, God has given me no inkling of His intentions, but He has imposed upon me the duty of



taking care of the body consistently with other more imperative obligations which, in my opinion, He has imposed upon me in common with the rest of humanity.<sup>21</sup>

I never overtax my physical strength. If you saw me, you would award me a certificate that I had been fairly successful in looking after myself. Or perhaps, to tell the truth, God is taking good care of me. But even He can do precious little if I frustrate His purpose. It is only because I have merged myself in Him that He preserves me from so many grave dangers. In Madras, I was in danger of being crushed to death every day but have been saved. It was due not to human effort, but to the will of God.<sup>22</sup>

Have no worry either about myself or anything else outside. We do not believe in God as an intellectual diversion. For us, He is real and He alone is real. We live and move in the Great Taskmaster's eye so that He may lead us as He will.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, of course, it is God who disposes. There will be no trouble so long as He wants to use me as an instrument of service; and when the time comes, there will be nothing that can ward it off. God's acts are always beneficent.<sup>24</sup>

My, your and everyone else's life thread is in the hands of Mirabai's *Valam* (Beloved, i.e., God). We should go wherever He leads us. He is hardly likely to let anyone behave as he will.<sup>25</sup>

### *'Faith that Staggers Not'*

"HAVE faith and a heart that staggers not. And if then, as Jesus has said, you say to a mountain: 'Remove thyself into the sea,' it shall so happen,"—a friend had remarked to me sometime back. Have I that faith? I want to put my faith in God to test. If He wants to get some work out of me, He would surely see me through all vicissitudes.

Why should I then be afraid of death?<sup>26</sup>

For those who have faith in God, life and death are alike. Ours is to serve till the last breath.<sup>27</sup>

I am in God's good hands. I shall wish neither one way nor the other. Sufficient unto the day is the good thereof. I must not think of the evil. No one knows what is really good or really evil. Therefore, let us think of nothing but good.<sup>28</sup>

I have cultivated the habit of not anticipating evil. I am able to know the remedy instinctively when I am face to face with an evil. That is how a God-fearing man acts. The fear of God disposes of every other fear.<sup>29</sup>

He who takes refuge in God has no fear.<sup>30</sup>

## CHAPTER XIII

### SURRENDER TO GOD'S WILL

MY experience tells me that the Kingdom of God is within us, and that we can realize it not by saying : 'Lord, Lord,' but by doing His will and His work. If, therefore, we wait for the Kingdom to come as something coming from outside, we shall be sadly mistaken.<sup>1</sup>

How shall we know the will? By prayer and right living. Indeed, prayer should mean right living. There is a *Bhajan* (hymn) whose refrain is : "Prayer has been never known to have failed anybody. Prayer means being one with God."<sup>2</sup>

God does not always allow us to do what we think is the best. I suppose we don't always know what is best.<sup>3</sup>

If all our dreams could be realized, life would become a phantasmagoria and there would be utter chaos on earth. God in His mercy, therefore, has ordained that His will alone should prevail on earth.<sup>4</sup>

Do we get all we want? If we did, where would our faith have any play at all? Sufficient to know that not a blade moves but by His will.<sup>5</sup>

We are all in God's hands. Not a blade moves but by His command. If we had all our own ways, the world will go to pieces. It is perhaps as well that our wishes are often frustrated. It is the test of our loyalty to God that we believe in Him even when He refuses to fulfil our wishes.<sup>6</sup>

There is meaning in our wishes (however pure) not being fulfilled. Not our will but His will be done.<sup>7</sup>

We are best tried when we are thwarted in what

to us are holy purposes. God's ways are strange and inscrutable. Not our will, but His must be our law.<sup>8</sup>

We are all His creatures to do His will, not ours.<sup>9</sup>

It is always well with those who believe in God and try to do His will to the best of their ability.<sup>10</sup>

Q. How can an ordinary man distinguish between God's will and his own will?

A. By not regarding anything as God's will unless he has positive proof to the contrary. Not every person can know God's will. Proper training is necessary to attain the power to know God's will.<sup>11</sup>

In all things it is the will of God that reigns.<sup>12</sup>

Not a sparrow falls without God's will.<sup>13</sup>

### *Let Us Dance to His Tune*

'WHOM the Lord protects, who dare hurt him?' Therefore, we shall live in such a condition as He thinks fit, do as He bides us do and dance to His tune.<sup>14</sup>

I am only His humble devotee. His devotees cannot claim to be He. They have got to dance to His tune.<sup>15</sup>

We are toys in the hands of God. He makes us dance to His tune. The utmost, therefore, that man can do is to refrain from interfering with the dance and that he should tender full obedience to his Maker's will.<sup>16</sup>

We are but straws in the hands of God. He alone can blow us where He pleases. We cannot oppose His wish.<sup>17</sup>

I am fatalist enough to believe that not a blade of grass moves but by His will.<sup>18</sup>

We must not be overwhelmed by difficulties, however great they may be, but trust God to solve them. We must be humble enough to know that it is He who gets His work done through men and women, who are mere instruments in the hands of that Great Actor. We must completely surrender ourselves to Him. Sudama

had to give up even that handful of rice he had kept back for himself before he could please God. If we surrender our all at His feet in that spirit of utter self-effacement, He will surely lead us to our goal.<sup>19</sup>

All difficulties can be overcome by leaning on God. Ever since I reached years of discretion, I have felt that God is always with those who wait on Him. In reality He is everywhere, but because He is formless and invisible, man cannot always sense His presence. But if we have listening ears, God speaks to us in our own language, whatever that language be. God is All-Powerful. Man lives at His will.<sup>20</sup>

God speaks to men in the inmost chamber of the heart. God is our one true friend. We are entirely in His hands.<sup>21</sup>

All of us are in His hands. It is well if we live, and it is equally well if we die. We are born only to die and we die only to be born again. This is all old argument. Yet it needs to be driven home. Somehow or other, we refuse to welcome death as we welcome birth. We refuse to believe even the evidence of our senses, that we could not possibly have any attachment for the body without the soul and that we have no evidence whatsoever that the soul perishes with the body.<sup>22</sup>

If we simply make ourselves instruments of His will, we should never have anxious moments. Yet, there is no calm without a storm, there is no peace without strife. Strife is inherent in peace. We should not know it without. Life is a perpetual struggle against strife, whether within or without. Hence the necessity of realizing peace in the midst of strife.<sup>23</sup>

### *God's Guidance*

THOSE who believe in God's guidance just do the best they can and never worry. The sun has never been



known to suffer from overstrain, and yet who slaves with such unexampled regularity as he! And why should we think that the sun is inanimate? The difference between him and us may be that he has no choice, we have a margin, no matter how precarious it may be. But no more speculation of this sort. Suffice it for us that we have his brilliant example in the matter of tireless energy. If we completely surrender ourselves to His (God's) will and really become *ciphers*, we, too, voluntarily give up the right of choice and then we need no wear and tear.<sup>24</sup>

Let us be content in such condition as God chooses to keep us.<sup>25</sup>

The spirit of resignation is bad when the sorrows come out of our conscious errors; but when they come for reasons we do not know and cannot know, resignation is the proper thing. In other words, constant endeavour and surrender to the will of God have to go hand in hand.<sup>26</sup>

He (God) is a jealous Lord. He will allow no one to share His authority. One has, therefore, to appear before Him in all one's weakness, empty-handed and in a spirit of full surrender, and then He enables you to stand before a whole world and protects you from all harm.<sup>27</sup>

### *Full Surrender*

NEVER imagine things good or bad until they stare you in the face. Full surrender means full freedom from all care. A child never has care for anything. It knows instinctively that it is being cared for by its parents. How much more true should it be with us grown up people? There you have the test of faith or detachment of the *Gita*, if you like.<sup>28</sup>

In any case, never imagine the worst. Since God is a God of Mercy, if we must imagine, it is best to imagine

the best. Of course, a votary of the *Gita* never imagines anything. Good and bad are after all relative terms. He takes note of things as they happen and reacts naturally to them, fulfilling his part as if propelled by the Great Mechanic, even as a piece of machine in good order responds automatically to the call of the mechanist. It is the most difficult thing for an *intelligent* being to be like a machine. And yet, if one is to become a zero, that is precisely what one desiring perfection has to become. The vital difference between the machine and the man is that the machine is inert, the man is all life and consciously becomes like a machine in the hands of the Master Mechanic. Krishna says, in so many words, that God moves all beings as if they were parts of a machine.<sup>29</sup>

### *God's Ways*

HUMAN language can but imperfectly describe God's ways. I am sensible of the fact that they are indescribable and inscrutable.<sup>30</sup>

God's ways are inscrutable. He often tests his favourites through defeats and manifold tribulations.<sup>31</sup>

God has His own way of choosing His instruments. . . . We must all keep our loins girt and our lamps well trimmed; we do not know when or on whom His choice may fall. . . . We must never give way to despair or pessimism. God's ways are more than man's arithmetic.<sup>32</sup>

God has His own wonderful way of executing His plans and choosing His instruments. The Prophet and Abu Bakr trapped in a cave were saved from their persecutors by a spider which had woven its web across the mouth of that cave.<sup>33</sup>

God is with us and looks after us, as if He had no other care besides. How this happens, I do not know. That it does happen, I do know. Those who have faith have all their cares lifted from off their shoulders.<sup>34</sup>

Remember, that God takes the burden of all our cares on His broad shoulders, if we will but let Him. Only His way is not our way. His shoulders are not like ours. But there is all the beauty in doing His will.<sup>35</sup>

We do not know God's hidden ways. If we only submit to Him, He makes us do many things even unconsciously to ourselves. It will be such a joy to me if you never find yourselves in the Valley of Despair, for, to be there even for one moment means lack of faith in a living God.<sup>36</sup>

## CHAPTER XIV

### 'BE CAREFUL FOR NOTHING'

**W**E must put faith in God and be careful for nothing.<sup>1</sup> 'Be careful for nothing' is one of the verses that have ever remained with me and taken possession of me. If God is, why need I care? He is the Infallible Caretaker. He is a foolish man who fusses although he is well protected.<sup>2</sup>

I know it is stupid to be anxious. God is above us all to protect and guide His own :

*"Rock of Ages, cleft for me ;  
Let me hide in Thee."*<sup>3</sup>

No one can protect you other than God. No man can protect another. None of us can say whether he is going to be alive the next day or even a minute after. God alone was, is and ever shall be. Therefore, it is our duty to call upon Him and rely on Him.<sup>4</sup>

If we have faith in God, we simply would not care to know beforehand how He may dispose of us. It is enough for us to hold ourselves perfectly in readiness for whatever happens. We are not allowed to know what tomorrow has in store for us, and our best conceived plans have a knack very often of going awry. The highest wisdom, therefore, is never to worry about the future, but to resign ourselves entirely to His will.<sup>5</sup>

If we are wise, we will take care of the present and the future will take care of itself. God has given us only a limited sphere of action and a limited vision. Sufficient unto the day is the good thereof.<sup>6</sup>

*All is From God*

SO long as we believe that all is from God, we should have no cause for perturbation. The only condition is

that whatever we do, we should do with God as witness. It is He who makes the world go, and we only reap the consequences of our actions. Therefore, ours is only to obey His law and then be indifferent as to the result.<sup>7</sup>

Who can tell whether it is good to be well or to be ill? You have heard the story of Nala and Damayanti. Nala was a very handsome man; in order to save him God ordered the snake Karkotak to bite and disfigure him. When he bit Nala, the king was deeply annoyed, but, later on, he came to know that the snake-bite was a gift from God. I am sure yours is a case of the same kind. Therefore, by all means take the necessary treatment, but never care whether you are well or ill. You must sing and dance with joy in all conditions.... You must wear a smile over your face, no matter what comes to pass. If you have dedicated your all at the feet of God, your body is His, not yours. The disease afflicts Him, not you. Where then is room for distress?<sup>8</sup>

### *Rejoice in Suffering*

GOD suffers us to blame Him, to swear at Him and deny Him. We do it all in our ignorance. A very beautiful Sanskrit verse \* which we recite daily at the morning prayer means: "Miseries are not miseries, nor is happiness truly happiness. True misery consists in forgetting God, true happiness consists in thinking of Him as ever enthroned in our hearts." And has not an English poet said: "Things are not what they seem"? The fact is, if we knew all the laws of God, we should be able to account for the unaccountable. Why should we think that withdrawal of your brother from our midst is an affliction? We simply do not know. But we do, or ought to know that God is wholly good and wholly just. Even our ill-

\* "विपदो नैव विपदः संपदो नैव संपदः ।

विपद् विस्मरणं विष्णोः संपन्नारायण स्मृतिः । ।"



ness may be no misfortune. Life is a state of discipline. We are required to go through the fire of suffering. I do so wish that you...could really rejoice in your suffering.<sup>9</sup>

There is no such thing as a blow in reality. After having entrusted oneself to God, where is any room left for a blow? Therefore, rejoice in suffering.<sup>10</sup>

Nothing happens without Divine permission. And how can we grieve over what He permits?<sup>11</sup>

It is a wrong thing to rehearse a calamity (*i.e.*, an event believed by us to be a calamity, though, in fact, it may be a blessing) and to reproduce in advance the feelings one would have. It is enough that we hold ourselves prepared for the worst. This we do by an ever increasing faith in God the Good, the Just, the Compassionate, the Bountiful, the Giver of the daily bread, the Help of the helpless, the All-Powerful, the All-Knowing, the Ever-Vigilant, the Whole Truth.<sup>12</sup>

### *Reliance on God*

IF you have a living faith in a living God, you would feel His never-failing presence protecting you. Till that state is reached, even faith in an individual, clothed in flesh and bone, is not of any avail. It is relying on a broken reed.<sup>13</sup>

The only effective protection comes from reliance upon internal strength, *i.e.*, on God.<sup>14</sup>

God is the source of all strength when every other earthly aid fails us. All human power is transient, and real safety can lie only when we place our reliance wholly on God.

*"Beneath the shadow of Thy Throne,*

*Thy saints have dwelt serene;*

*Sufficient is Thine arm alone,*

*And our defence is sure."*

This is a lesson which all of us sorely need to learn.<sup>15</sup>

God alone was, is and ever shall be. Therefore, it is our duty to call upon Him and rely on Him.<sup>16</sup>

God is the Master Trickster. He knows how to confound us, frustrate our 'knavish tricks'. He sends death when one least expects it. He sends life when we see no sign of it.<sup>17</sup>

God is the greatest Revolutionist the world has ever known or will know. He sends deluges. He sends storms where a moment ago there was calm. He levels down mountains which He builds with exquisite care and infinite patience. I do watch the sky and it fills me with awe and wonder. In the serene blue sky, both of India and England, I have seen clouds gathering and bursting with a fury which has struck me dumb.<sup>18</sup>

Man is born to live in the midst of dangers and alarms. The whole existence of man is a ceaseless duel between the forces of life and death....God makes crooked straight for us and sets things right when they seem to go dead wrong.<sup>19</sup>

### *Why Be Afraid?*

WHY should one who knows that God is there to protect us all be afraid? But His protection does not mean that we may not be robbed or that we may not be bitten by a snake. Such incidents do not show that He protects us any the less, but that we had not enough faith in Him. The river is always willing to give its water to all, but how is the river to be blamed if some one does not fill his bucket at it, or does not go near it believing the water to be poisonous? All fear is a sign of want of faith. But faith cannot be acquired by force of intellect. It comes but slowly after deep meditation and continuous practice. We pray, sing hymns, read books,

seek the association of men of God, and perform the spinning sacrifice in order to attain that faith.<sup>20</sup>

I hope none of you was frightened on account of the torrential rains and floods. Such occasions arise to test whether we have learnt the lessons of life. What would it matter if the *Ashram* was carried away by the flood in spite of our best endeavours, or even Ahmedabad? The wonder is that so much has remained safe in spite of such torrential floods. But, after all, who knows whether we are gainers by their being saved or by their being lost? It may be that what has been saved has really been lost, and what has been lost has really been saved. But everyone likes to be saved, and we are thankful to God if we are saved. Actually, however, one should thank God for everything that transpires. That is what is meant by the state of equanimity.<sup>21</sup>

But it is only in this manner that Nature gives us rude shocks and reminds us that there is nothing permanent, nothing ever-lasting except God Himself; and that, therefore, ours is but honourably and humbly to labour only to do His will, irrespective of consequences.<sup>22</sup>

### *'Blessed Are They That Expect Nothing'*

BLESSED are they that expect nothing.

You say that your fears are not due to want of faith in God, but want of faith in self. But these are one and the same thing. Want of faith in self comes from want of faith in God. It betrays ignorance of what God is.

Then, again, you say want of faith comes from our want of self-restraint. This is true, but it connotes the same thing. Read the Verse 59 of Chapter II; *Gita*. Objects of senses are eradicated only by seeing God face to face, in other words, by faith in God.

To have complete faith in God is to see Him. Nor is the matter any better by assuming the existence of the

fourth dimension. It ultimately points to the same thing. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all else will be added unto you." When we meet Him, we will dance in the joy of His presence and there will be neither fear of snakes, nor of the death of dear ones. For, there is no death and no snake-bite in His presence.

The fact is that the most living faith, too, falls short of the perfect. Hence, there is no such thing as complete absence of fear for the embodied, *i.e.*, imprisoned soul. The possession of the body is a limitation. It is a wall of separation. We can, therefore, but try to shed our fear, *i.e.*, increase our faith.<sup>23</sup>

### *Waiting on God*

I BELIEVE in waiting on God for guidance.<sup>24</sup>

We are all in God's keeping and if we wait upon Him and Him alone, whatever happens is for our good. Even so-called afflictions turn out then to be for our benefit.<sup>25</sup>

If we have trust in God we should not worry, even as we would not when we have a trustworthy doorkeeper or guard. And who can be a better door-keeper or guard than God the never-failing. It is not enough that we sing about such things or have a mere intellectual grasp. It is necessary to feel the thing within. Feeling is exactly like feeling pain or pleasure. It admits of or needs no argument. Who can argue us out of our experience?<sup>26</sup>

Feeling is of the heart. It may easily lead us astray unless we would keep the heart pure. It is like keeping house and everything in it clean. The heart is the source from which knowledge of God springs. If the source is contaminated, every other remedy is useless. And if its purity is assured, nothing else is needed.<sup>27</sup>

God never comes to us except through the way of

fire. There is a deep unconscious joy felt during such purifying agony.<sup>28</sup>

If proofs were needed, God is proving for me His greatness and goodness every day. You remember the hymn "Count your many blessings". I think it is in Moody and Sankey's Hymn Book. I can't even count the blessings, they are so many. For, even the so-called sorrows and pains He sends, descend like blessings. If we knew His love, we should know that He has nothing but blessings and never curses for His creation.<sup>29</sup>

We must accept in thankfulness everything that God has in store for us. 'One step enough for me'. So we shall be careful for nothing.<sup>30</sup>



## CHAPTER XV

### 'HELP OF THE HELPLESS'

**G**OD is great and compassionate. He would not try His servants beyond endurance.<sup>1</sup>

God tries His votaries through and through, but never beyond endurance. He gives them strength enough to go through the ordeal He prescribes for them.<sup>2</sup>

God is both gentle and hard. He tries us through and through to the last suffering point, but He is so gentle as never to test us to the breaking point.<sup>3</sup>

God sometimes does try to the uttermost those whom He wishes to bless.<sup>4</sup>

The Divine guidance often comes when the horizon is the blackest.<sup>5</sup>

All the religions of the world describe God pre-eminently as the Friend of the friendless, Help of the helpless and Protector of the weak.<sup>6</sup>

God is great, and we are but dust. But, thanks to our pride, whilst we say with our lips God is great, our actions belie the profession and show that we think nothing of God and a 'mighty lot' of ourselves. But it is time to realize our helplessness.<sup>7</sup>

Those who empty themselves of all pride and all egotism have the greatest help from God.<sup>8</sup>

The need of the moment is to realize our helplessness. A Tamil proverb truly has it: 'God is the Help of the helpless'. This realization will show us a way out of the present impenetrable darkness. For us, helpless men and women, who have to serve from day to day and often in the face of gloomy despair, it is enough if we can sing with the Seer: 'One step enough for me'.<sup>9</sup>

God is the true father, mother, relative and friend. Others are only so-called; they are helpless themselves

and unable to help even if they wish. Do not, therefore, depend upon them but upon God who is present everywhere. He will send you such help as He thinks fit.<sup>10</sup>

God helps the helpless, not those who believe they can do something.<sup>11</sup>

Well, God does help the helpless and He only helps when man is utterly helpless.<sup>12</sup>

The chief of the elephants had gone for a drink to the river, when he was caught hold of by an alligator. A furious struggle ensued; but, in spite of his strength, the elephant was dragged into deeper waters. When he was on the point of being drowned, the elephant realized that his huge strength was of no avail, and he prayed to God for succour. God, the Help of the helpless, came to his rescue and saved him from the jaws of death.

The moral is obvious. The strength of the strong without God's help has been often found to be useless. Therefore, there should be dependence not on outside sources, but upon the inner strength which comes to all who sincerely seek it from God.<sup>13</sup>

### *'My Refuge'*

I KNOW that I can do nothing. God can do everything. O God, make me Thy fit instrument and use me as Thou wilt!

Man is nothing. Napoleon planned much and found himself a prisoner in St. Helena. The mighty Kaiser aimed at the Crown of Europe and is reduced to the status of a private gentleman. God had so willed it. Let us contemplate such examples and be humble.

During these days . . . , I have hummed to myself a hymn we often sing at the *Satyagraha Ashram*. It is so good that I cannot resist the pleasure of sharing a free rendering of it with the reader. The words of the hymn better express my state than anything else I can write.

Here they are :

*" My honour, O God, is in Thy keeping ;  
 Thou art ever my Refuge,  
 For Thou art Protector of the weak.  
 It is Thy promise to listen to the wail of  
 sinners ;  
 I am a sinner of old, help me  
 Thou to cross this ocean of darkness.  
 It is Thine to remove the sin.  
 And the misery of mankind.  
 Be gracious to Tulsidas  
 And make him Thy devotee."*<sup>14</sup>

### *Advice to Young Men*

I AM inundated with letters from young men who write frankly about their evil habits and about the void that their unbelief has made in their lives. No mere medical advice can bring them relief. I can only tell them that there is no way but that of surrender to and trust in God and His grace. Let us all give the living religion in our lives the place it deserves. Has not Akhobhagat said :

*" Live as you will, but so  
 As to realize God."*<sup>15</sup>

Many young men from various colleges write to me pathetic letters, asking me to tell them how they can get

### **श्राम पीलू : तीन ताल**

रघुवीर ! तुमको मेरी लाज ।  
 सदा सदा मैं सरन तिहारी, तुम बड़े गरीब निवाज ॥  
 पतित उधारन विरुद्ध तिहारो, श्रवणन सुनी अवाज ।  
 हों तो पतित पुरातन कहिये, पार उतारो जहाज ॥  
 अध-खडन, दुःख-भजन जन के, यही तिहारो काज ।  
 तुलसिदास पर कृपा करिये, भक्ति-दान देह आज ॥

rid of their mental weakness. I have suggested to them the age-old prescription. They will no longer feel helpless if they will seek the help of God through all their weakness.<sup>16</sup>

God never answers the prayers of the arrogant, nor the prayers of those who bargain with Him....If you would ask Him to help you, you would go to Him in all your nakedness, approach Him without reservations, also without fear or doubts as to how He can help a fallen being like you. He who has helped millions who have approached Him, is He going to desert you? He makes no exceptions whatsoever, and you will find that every one of your prayers will be answered. The prayer of even the most impure will be answered. I am telling this out of my personal experience. I have gone through the purgatory. Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and everything will be added unto you.<sup>17</sup>

### *God—The Strength of the Weak*

THERE are those who are struck with doubt and despair. For them there is the Name of God. It is God's covenant that whoever goes to Him in weakness and helplessness, him He will make strong. 'When I am weak, then I am strong'. As the Poet Surdas has sung: '*Rama* is the strength of the weak'. This strength is not to be obtained by taking up arms or by similar means. It is to be had by throwing oneself on His Name. *Rama* is but a synonym of God. You may say God or *Allah* or whatever other name you like, but the moment you trust naught but Him, you are strong, all disappointment disappears.<sup>18</sup>

God is known not by His thousand names only, but by millions of names. Any name, which comes from the heart and by which we can recognize Him, is as good as any other, or, rather the best of all for us.<sup>19</sup>

It does not matter whether we call on the Lord as

*Hari* or *Rama* or *Krishna*, for He has a thousand names, or, rather, as many names and forms as there are human beings.<sup>20</sup>

### *God's Service*

IF you awake every morning with His name on your lips and invoke His aid to help you in your struggles during the day, and at night time before retiring take stock of the day's failures and lapses, make a confession of them to your Maker and do a sincere penance for them,—the only fitting penance for a lapse is to make a firm resolve not to allow it to happen again,—you will thereby build, as it were, a solid wall of protection round you and gradually temptations will cease to assail you.<sup>21</sup>

Q. What counsel do you give to the young men who are fighting a losing battle with their lower selves and come to you for advice?

A. Simply prayer. One must humble oneself utterly, and look beyond oneself for strength.

Q. But what if the young men complain that their prayer is not heard, that they feel like speaking to brass heavens, as it were?

A. To want an answer to one's prayer is to tempt God. If prayer fails to bring relief, it is only lip-prayer. If prayer does not help, nothing else will. One must go on ceaselessly. This, then, is my message to the youth. In spite of themselves, the youth must believe in the all-conquering power of Love and Truth.

Q. The difficulty with our youth is that the study of science and modern philosophy has demolished their faith, and so they are burnt up by the fire of disbelief.

A. That is due to the fact that with them faith is an effort of the intellect, not an experience of the soul. Intellect takes us along in the battle of life to a certain limit, but at the crucial moment it fails us. Faith tran-



scends reason. It is when the horizon is the darkest, and human reason is beaten down to the ground, that faith shines brightest and comes to our rescue. It is such faith that our youth requires, and this comes when one has shed all pride of intellect and surrendered oneself entirely to His will.<sup>22</sup>

God always helps those who help themselves. Their reliance must be on the living God.<sup>23</sup>

Final reliance is and must be upon God. He is the never-failing and sole Help of the helpless.<sup>24</sup>

No person who has faith in a living God need feel helpless or forlorn.<sup>25</sup>

Nothing is difficult if we have a living faith in God. Let us realize our own weakness and approach Him, and He will surely help.<sup>26</sup>

You must know that the only Help of the helpless is God. There is no greater punishment or misery for man than that his faith in God should be blasted.<sup>27</sup>

### *God Never Forsakes*

GOD is the hardest taskmaster I have known on this earth, and He tries you through and through. And when you find that your faith is failing or your body is failing you and you are sinking, He comes to your assistance somehow or other and proves to you that you must not lose your faith and that He is always at your beck and call, but on His terms, not on your terms. So I have found. I cannot really recall a single instance when, at the eleventh hour, He has forsaken me.<sup>28</sup>

I can certainly say that though everyone else may forsake you, God never forsakes people in distress. When I studied Tamil many years ago, I came across a proverb which I cannot forget. This is it: '*Tikkattravannukku Daivamedhune*', which means 'for those who are helpless, God is the Help'. But it should not remain merely on

our lips, it should enter our hearts, and then no matter how many cyclones we have, we shall rejoice within.<sup>29</sup>

### *Help of the Helpless*

OF all my Tamil lessons, one proverb at least abides with me as an evergreen. Its literal meaning is : 'God is the only Help for the helpless.' The grand theory of *Satyagraha* is built upon a belief in that truth. Hindu religious literature is full of illustrations to prove the truth.<sup>30</sup>

In Mira's song, the devotee prays to God to come to his aid and deliver Him from distress. For He alone can do so, none else. Let us pray to God then to deliver us from our distress. If our prayer is sincere, we will rely on Him entirely.<sup>31</sup>

God never fails his devotees in the hour of trial. The condition is that there must be a living faith in and the uttermost reliance on Him. The test of faith is that having done our duty, we must be prepared to welcome whatever He may send—joy as well as sorrow, good luck as well as bad. We will then feel like King Janaka who, when informed that his capital was ablaze, only remarked that it was no concern of his. The secret of his resignation and equanimity was that he was ever awake, never remiss in the performance of his duty. Having done his duty, he could leave the rest to God.

And so a man of prayer will, in the first place, be spared mishaps by the ever merciful Providence, but if the mishaps do come he will not bewail his fate, but bear it with an undisturbed peace of mind and joyous resignation to His will.<sup>32</sup>

### *The Protecting Power*

I DO believe it as literally true that Mirabai never felt the pains inflicted upon her at the instance of her husband. Her love of God and conscious repetition of that precious Name kept her cheerful for ever. I can only picture the

Rajput women of old rejoicing as they leapt into the funeral pyre with the name of God on their lips. Latimer certainly never felt the pain, as he majestically stretched forth his hand straight into the fire. His faith in God and His righteousness had saved him. The age of miracles is not past. But a little faith in God and His protecting power and we are ensured against *unbearable* sufferings.<sup>33</sup>

God never ordains that only things that we like should happen, and things that we do not like should not happen. In spite of the helplessness, the faith sustains me that He is the Help of the helpless, that He comes to one's succour only when one throws himself on His mercy. . . . He has vouchsafed to us the ship of faith which alone can enable us to cross the ocean of doubt.<sup>34</sup>

### ‘Rock of Ages’

A MAN with a grain of faith in God never loses hope, because he ever believes in the ultimate triumph of Truth. A man of God never strives after untruth and, therefore, he can never lose hope. On the contrary, his hope shines the brightest ‘amidst encircling gloom’.

There is a beautiful Tamil proverb which says : ‘God is the sole Help of the helpless’. The truth of this never came upon me with so much force as it has come today. Handling large masses of men, dealing with them, speaking and acting for them is no joke for a man whose capacity God has so circumscribed. One has, therefore, to be ever on the watch.

And I cried out to God, even like Draupadi when she seemed to be abandoned by her five brave protectors. And her cry did not ascend to the Almighty in vain. That cry must not be from the lip. It has to be from the deepest recesses of one's heart. And, therefore, such a cry is only possible when one is in anguish. My heart continually says :

*"Rock of Ages cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee".<sup>35</sup>*

Even as Draupadi forsaken by her husbands, forsaken by men and gods alike, asked God and God alone to come to her help, and God gave her unfailing help, so it is with me and so should it be with every one of us. Let us ask for help from God, the All-Powerful, and tell Him that we, His tiny creatures, have failed to do what we ought to do.<sup>36</sup>

Draupadi, when she found that not even her five husbands could help her, cried out in agony to Krishna, the only Help of the helpless, and he heard her prayers. Even so shall I work away today and cry in the name of the dumb millions of India, and, I am sure, my prayers will be heard one day.<sup>37</sup>

'Rock of ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee'—is a prayer common to all religions. If we can but throw ourselves into His lap as our only Help, we shall come out scatheless through every ordeal.<sup>38</sup>

When we suffer voluntarily and, therefore, without expectation of reward, the cry of suffering (one might say) literally ascends to heaven and God above hears it and responds. That is the path of religion, and it has answered even if one man has adopted it in its entirety.<sup>39</sup>

## CHAPTER XVI

### WHAT IS PRAYER?

**I** BELIEVE that prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and, therefore, prayer must be the very core of the life of man, for no man can live without religion. There are some who, in the egotism of their reason, declare that they have nothing to do with religion. But it is like a man saying that he breathes, but that he has no nose.

Whether by reason, or by instinct, or by superstition, man acknowledges some sort of relationship with the Divine. The rankest agnostic or atheist does acknowledge the need of a moral principle, and associates something good with its observance and something bad with its non-observance. Bradlaugh, whose atheism is well-known, always insisted on proclaiming his innermost conviction. He had to suffer a lot for thus speaking the truth, but he delighted in it and said that truth is its own reward. Not that he was quite insensible to the joy resulting from the observance of Truth. This joy, however, is not at all wordly, but springs out of communion with the Divine. That is why I have said that even a man who disowns religion cannot and does not live without religion.

Now, I come to the next thing, *viz.*, that prayer is the very core of man's life, as it is the most vital part of religion. Prayer is either petitional or, in its wider sense, is inward communion. In either case, the ultimate result is the same. Even when it is petitional, the petition should be for the cleansing and purification of the soul, for freeing it from the layers of ignorance and darkness that envelop it. He, therefore, who hungers for the awakening of the Divine in him, must fall back on prayer.

But prayer is no mere exercise of words or of the



ears, it is no mere repetition of empty formula.\* Any amount of repetition of *Ramunama* is futile, if it fails to stir the soul. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. It must be in clear response to the spirit which hungers for it. And even as a hungry man relishes a hearty meal, a hungry soul will relish a heart-felt prayer. And I am giving you a bit of my experience and that of my companions when I say that he, who has experienced the magic of prayer, may do without food for days together, but not a single moment without prayer. For, without prayer there is no inward peace.

If that is the case, someone will say, we should be offering our prayers every minute of our lives. There is no doubt about it; but we erring mortals, who find it difficult to retire within ourselves for inward communion even for a single moment, will find it impossible to remain perpetually in communion with the Divine. We, therefore, fix some hours when we make a serious effort to throw off the attachments of the world for a while, we make a serious endeavour to remain, so to say, out of the flesh. You have heard Surdas' hymn.† It is the passionate cry of a soul hungering for union with the Divine. According to our standards, he was a saint; but, according to his own, he was a proclaimed sinner. Spiritually, he was miles ahead of us; but he felt the separation from the Divine so keenly that he has uttered that anguished cry in loathing and despair.

I have talked of the necessity for prayer, and there-through I have dealt with the essence of prayer. We are

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\*"Empty prayer is as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

— *Young India*: Sept. 25, 1924.

†"Where is there a wretch  
So loathsome and wicked as I?  
I have forsaken my Maker,  
So faithless have I been."

born to serve our fellowmen, and we cannot properly do so unless we are wide awake. There is an eternal struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and he who has not the sheet-anchor of prayer to rely upon will be a victim to the powers of darkness. The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the whole world; the man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable. Apart, therefore, from its bearing on man's condition after death, prayer has incalculable value for man in this world of the living. Prayer is the only means of bringing about orderliness and peace and repose in our daily acts. Take care of the vital thing and other things will take care of themselves. Rectify one angle of a square, and the other angles will be automatically right.

Begin, therefore, your day with prayer, and make it so soulful that it may remain with you until the evening. Close the day with prayer, so that you may have a peaceful night free from dreams and nightmares.\* Do not worry about the form of prayer. Let it be any form, it should be such as can put us into communion with the Divine. Only, whatever be the form, let not the spirit wander while the words of prayer run on out of your mouth

Restraint self-imposed is no compulsion. A man, who chooses the path of freedom from restraint, i.e., of self-indulgence, will be a bond-slave of passions, whilst the man who binds himself to rules and restraints releases himself. All things in the Universe, including the sun and the moon and the stars, obey certain laws. Without the restraining influence of these laws, the world would not

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\*"Prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening."

go on for a single moment. You will go to pieces if you do not impose on yourselves some sort of discipline, and prayer is a necessary spiritual discipline. It is discipline and restraint that separates us from the brute. If we will be men, walking with our heads erect and not walking on all fours, let us understand and put ourselves under voluntary discipline and restraint.<sup>1</sup>

*What is the Best Form of Prayer?*

A MEDICAL graduate asks :

"What is the best form of prayer? How much time should be spent at it? In my opinion, to do justice is the best form of prayer and one who is sincere about doing justice to all, does not need to do any more praying. Some people spend a long time over *Sandhya* and 95 per cent of them do not understand the meaning of what they say. In my opinion, prayer should be said in one's mother tongue. It alone can affect the soul best. I should say that a sincere prayer for one minute is enough. It should suffice to promise God not to sin."

Prayer means asking God for something in a reverent attitude. But the word is used also to denote any devotional act. Worship is a better term to use for what the correspondent has in mind.

But definition apart, what is it that millions of Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians and Jews and others do every day during the time set apart for the adoration of the Maker? It seems to me that it is a yearning of the heart to be one with the Maker, an invocation for His blessing. It is the attitude that matters, not words uttered or muttered.

And often the association of words that have been handed down from ancient times has an effect which, in their rendering into one's mother-tongue, they will lose altogether. Thus, the *Gayatri* translated and recited in, say, Gujarati, will not have the same effect as the original.

The utterance of the word *Rama* will instantaneously affect millions of Hindus, while the word God, although they may understand the meaning, will leave them untouched. Words after all acquire power by long usage and sacredness associated with their use. There is much, therefore, to be said for the retention of the old Sanskrit formulæ for the most prevalent *mantras* or verses. That the meaning of them should be properly understood goes without saying.

There can be no fixed rule laid down as to the time these devotional acts should take. It depends upon individual temperament. These are precious moments in one's daily life. The exercises are intended to sober and humble us, and enable us to realize that nothing happens without His will and that we are but 'clay in the hands of the Potter.' These are moments when one reviews one's immediate past, confesses one's weakness, asks for forgiveness and strength to be and do better. One minute may be enough for some, twenty-four hours may be too little for others. For those who are filled with the presence of God in them, to labour is to pray. The life is one continuous prayer or act of worship. For those others who act only to sin, to indulge themselves, and live for self, no time is too much. If they had patience and faith and the will to be pure, they would pray till they feel the definite purifying presence of God within them.

For us ordinary mortals, there must be a middle path between these two extremes. We are not so exalted as to be able to say that all our acts are a dedication, nor perhaps are we so far gone as to be living purely for self. Hence have all religions set apart times for general devotion. Unfortunately, these have nowadays become merely mechanical and formal, where they are not hypocritical. What is necessary, therefore, is the correct attitude to accompany these devotions.



For definite personal prayer, in the sense of asking God for something, it should certainly be in one's own tongue. Nothing can be grander than to ask God to make us act justly towards everything that lives.<sup>2</sup>

### *No Belief in Prayer*

Q. I have no belief in prayer, as I do not believe in anything known as God to which I should pray. I never feel any necessity of supposing a God for myself. What do I lose if I do not care for Him and calmly and sincerely work my own schemes?

A. It is easy enough to say : 'I do not believe in God', for God permits all things to be said of Him with impunity. He looks at our acts. And any breach of His Law carries with it, not its vindictive but its purifying, compelling punishment. God's existence cannot be, does not need to be proved. God is. If He is not felt, so much the worse for us. The absence of feeling is a disease which we shall some day throw off *nolens volens*.

Prayer is not an asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is a daily admission of one's weakness. The tallest among us has a perpetual reminder of his nothingness before death, disease, old age, accident etc. We are living in the midst of death. What is the value of 'working for our own schemes' when they might be reduced to naught in the twinkling of an eye, or when we may be equally swiftly and unawares taken away from them? But we may feel strong as a rock, if we could truthfully say 'we work for God and His scheme.' Then, all is as clear as daylight. Then, nothing perishes. All perishing is then only what seems. Death and destruction have *then, but only then*, no reality about them. For, death or destruction is then but a change. An artist destroys his picture for creating a better one. A watch-maker throws away a bad spring to put in a new and useful one.<sup>3</sup>



*How and Whom to Pray*

Q. Often, Sir, do you ask us to worship God, to pray, but never tell us how to and whom to do so. Will you kindly enlighten me ?

A. Worshipping God is singing the praise of God. Prayer is a confession of one's unworthiness and weakness. God has a thousand names, or rather, He is Nameless. We may worship or pray to Him by whichever name that pleases us. Some call Him *Rama*, some *Krishna*, others call him *Rahim*, and yet some call Him God. All worship the same Spirit; but as all foods do not agree with all, all names do not appeal to all. Each chooses the name according to his associations, and He being the In-Dweller, All-Powerful and Omniscient, knows our innermost feelings and responds to us according to our deserts.

Worship or prayer, therefore, is not to be performed with the lips, but with the heart. And that is why it can be performed equally by the dumb and the stammerer, by the ignorant and the stupid. And the prayers of those whose tongues are nectared but whose hearts are full of poison are never heard. He, therefore, who would pray to God, must cleanse his heart. *Rama* was not only on the lips of Hanuman, He was enthroned in his heart. He gave Hanuman exhaustless strength. In His strength, he lifted the mountain and crossed the ocean. It is faith that steers us through stormy seas, faith that moves mountains and faith that jumps across the ocean. That faith is nothing but a living, wide-awake consciousness of God within. He who has achieved that faith wants nothing. Bodily diseased, he is spiritually healthy; physically poor, he rolls in spiritual riches.

'But how is the heart to be cleansed to this extent ?' one might well ask. The language of the lips is easily taught; but who can teach the language of the heart ? Only the *Bhakta*—the true devotee—knows it and can teach

it. The *Gita* has defined the *Bhakta* in three places, and talked of him generally everywhere. But a knowledge of the definition of a *Bhakta* is hardly a sufficient guide. They are rare on this earth. I have, therefore, suggested the religion of service as the means. God of Himself seeks for His seat the heart of him who serves his fellow-men. That is why Narsinha Mehta who 'saw and knew' sang: 'He is a true *Vaishnava* who knows to melt at other's woe.' Such was Abu Ben Adhem. He served his fellowmen, and, therefore, his name topped the list of those who served God.

But who are the suffering and the woe-begone? The suppressed and the poverty-stricken. He who would be a *Bhakta*, therefore, must serve these by body, soul and mind. How can he who regards the 'suppressed' classes as untouchables serve them by the body? He who does not even condescend to exert his body to the extent of spinning for the sake of the poor, and trots out lame excuses, does not know the meaning of service. An able-bodied wretch deserves no alms, but an appeal to work for his bread. Alms debase him. He who spins before the poor, inviting them to do likewise, serves God as no one else does. 'He who gives Me even a trifle as a fruit or a flower or even a leaf in the spirit of *Bhakti*, is My servant', says the Lord in the *Bhagvad Gita*. And He hath His foot-stool where live 'the humble, the lowliest and lost.' Spinning, therefore, for such is the greatest prayer, the greatest worship, the greatest sacrifice.

Prayer, therefore, may be done by any name. A prayerful heart is the vehicle, and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus, who in this age serve the untouchables from a full heart, truly pray; the Hindus and those others who spin prayerfully for the poor and the indigent truly pray.<sup>4</sup>

Honest and selfless work is the truest prayer. And no such prayer has ever gone unanswered.<sup>5</sup>

*"Is Not Service Worship?"*

Q. Would it not be better for a man to give the time he spends on the worship of God to the service of the poor? And should not true service make devotional worship unnecessary for such a man?

A. I sense mental laziness as also agnosticism in this question. The biggest of *Karmayogis* never give up devotional song or worship. Idealistically, it may be said that true service of others is itself worship and that such devotees do not need to spend any time in songs etc. As a matter of fact, *Bhajans* etc., are a help to true service and keep the remembrance of God fresh in the heart of the devotee.<sup>6</sup>

*Prayer is Never Fruitless*

A PRAYER can be offered in connection with some person or thing, and may even be granted. But if it is offered without any such specific end in view, it will confer a greater benefit on the world as well as ourselves. Prayer exerts an influence over ourselves; our soul becomes more vigilant, and the greater its vigilance, the wider the sphere of its influence. Prayer is a function of the heart. We speak aloud in order to wake it up. The Power that pervades the universe is also present in the human heart. The body does not offer it any obstruction. The obstruction is something of our own making, and is removed by prayer.

We can never know if a prayer has or has not yielded the desired result. I may pray for Narmada's relief from pain; even if she is free from pain afterwards, I must not assume that that is due to my prayer. Prayer is never fruitless, but we cannot know what the fruit of it is. Nor should we imagine that it is a good thing if it yields the

desired result. Here, too, the *Gita* doctrine has to be practised. We may pray for something and yet remain free from attachment. We may pray for someone's *Mukti* (salvation), but should not worry whether he gets or does not get what we want for him. Even if the result is just the opposite of what we had asked for, that is no reason for the conclusion that the prayer has been fruitless.<sup>7</sup>

: *True Prayer Never Goes Unanswered*

TRUE prayer never goes unanswered. It does not mean that every little thing we ask for from God is readily given to us. It is only when we shed our selfishness with a conscious effort and approach God in true humility that our prayers find a response.

In the *Ashram* prayer, nothing is asked. The prayer is for God to make us better men and women. If the prayer comes truly from the heart, God's grace would surely descend upon us. There is not a blade of grass which moves without His will, not one single true thought which does not leave a mark on character. It is good, therefore, to develop the daily habit of prayer.<sup>8</sup>

There should not be any disappointment, if our prayers are not answered in the way we may expect. If we are inclined to judge God this way, we are much mistaken. God answers prayer in His own way, not ours. His ways are different from the ways of mortals. Hence they are inscrutable. Prayer presupposes faith. No prayer goes in vain. Prayer is like any other action. It bears fruit whether we see it or not, and the fruit of heart-prayer is far more potent than action so-called.<sup>9</sup>

Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action.<sup>10</sup>

*A Dialogue with a Buddhist*

*Dr. Fabri:* Can the Divine Mind be changed by prayer? Can one find it out by prayer?

*Gandhiji:* The Divine Mind is unchangeable, but that Divinity is in everyone and everything—animate and inanimate. The meaning of prayer is that I want to evoke that Divinity within me. Now I may have that intellectual conviction, but not a living touch. And so when I pray for *Swaraj* or Independence for India, I pray or wish for adequate power to gain that *Swaraj* or to make the largest contribution I can towards winning it, and I maintain that I can get that power in answer to prayer.

*Dr. Fabri:* Then you are not justified in calling it prayer. To pray means to beg or demand.

*Gandhiji:* Yes, indeed. You may say I beg it of myself, of my Higher Self, the Real Self with which I have not yet achieved complete identification. You may, therefore, describe it as a continual longing to lose oneself in the Divinity which comprises all.

*Dr. Fabri:* And you use an old form to evoke this?

*Gandhiji:* I do. The habit of a lifetime persists, and I would allow it to be said that I pray to an outside Power. I am part of that Infinite, and yet such an infinitesimal part that I feel outside it. Though I give you the intellectual explanation, I feel without identification with the Divinity so small that I am nothing. Immediately I begin to say I do this thing and that thing, I begin to feel that someone else, some Higher Power, has to help me.

*Dr. Fabri:* Tolstoy says the same thing. Prayer really is complete meditation and melting into the Higher Self, though one occasionally does lapse in imploration like that of a child to his father.

*Gandhiji:* Pardon me. I would not call it a lapse.



It is more in the fitness of things to say that I pray to God who exists somewhere up in the clouds, and the more distant He is, the greater is my longing for Him and find myself in His presence in thought. And thought, as you know, has a greater velocity than light. Therefore, the distance between me and Him, though so incalculably great, is obliterated. He is so far and yet so near.

*Dr. Fabri:* It becomes a matter of belief, but some people like me are cursed with an acute critical faculty. For me, there is nothing higher than what Buddha taught, and no greater master. For, Buddha alone among the teachers of the world said: 'Don't believe implicitly what I say. Don't accept any dogma or any book as infallible.' There is for me no infallible book in the world, inasmuch as all were made by men, however inspired they may have been. I cannot hence believe in a personal idea of God, a *Maharaja* sitting on the Great White Throne listening to our prayers. I am glad that your prayer is on a different level.

*Gandhiji:* Let me remind you that you are again only *partially* true when you say my prayer is on a different level. I told you that the intellectual conviction that I gave you is not eternally present with me. What is present is the intensity of faith whereby I lose myself in an Invisible Power. And so, it is far truer to say that God has done a thing for me than that I did it. So many things have happened in my life for which I had intense longing, but which I could never have achieved myself. And I have always said to my co-workers it was in answer to my prayer. I did not say to them it was in answer to my intellectual effort to lose myself in the Divinity in me. The easiest and the correct thing for me was to say: "God has seen me through my difficulty".

*Dr. Fabri:* But that you deserved by your *Karma*.

God is Justice and not Mercy. You are a good man and good things happen to you.

*Gandhiji*: No fear. I am not good enough for things to happen like that. If I went about with that philosophical conception of *Karma*, I should often come a cropper. My *Karma* would not come to my help. Although I believe in the inexorable Law of *Karma*, I am striving to do so many things, every moment of my life is strenuous endeavour, which is an attempt to build up more *Karma*, to undo the past and add to the present. It is, therefore, wrong to say that because my past is good, good is happening at present. The present would be soon exhausted, and I have to build up the future. I tell you *Karma* alone is powerless. 'Ignite this match,' I say to myself, and yet I cannot if there is no co-operation from without. Before I strike the match my hand is paralyzed or I have only one match and the wind blows it off. Is it an accident or God or Higher Power? Well, I prefer to use the language of my ancestors or of children. I am no better than a child. We may try to talk learnedly and of books, but when it comes to brass tacks—when we are face to face with a calamity—we behave like children and begin to cry and pray and our intellectual belief gives no satisfaction!

*Dr. Fabri*: I know very highly developed men to whom belief in God gives incredible comfort and help in the building of character. But there are some great spirits that can do without it. That is what Buddhism has taught me.

*Gandhiji*: But Buddhism is one long prayer. \*

*Dr. Fabri*: Buddha asked everyone to find salvation for himself. He never prayed, he meditated.

*Gandhiji*: Call it by whatever name you like, it is the same thing. Look at his statues.

*Dr. Fabri:* But they are not true to life. They are 400 years later than his death.

*Gandhiji:* Well, give me your own history of Buddha as you may have discovered it. I will prove that he was a praying Buddha. The intellectual conception does not satisfy me. I have not given you a perfect and full definition as you cannot describe your own thought. The very effort to describe is a limitation. It defies analysis and you have nothing but scepticism as the residue.

*Dr. Fabri:* What about the people who cannot pray?

*Gandhiji:* 'Be humble,' I would say to them, 'and do not limit even the real Buddha by your own conception of Buddha.' He could not have ruled the lives of millions of men that he did and does today, if he was not humble enough to pray. There is something infinitely higher than intellect that rules us, and even the sceptics. Their scepticism and philosophy do not help them in critical periods of their lives. They need something better, something outside them that can sustain them. And so, if someone puts a conundrum before me, I say to him: 'You are not going to know the meaning of God or prayer, unless you reduce yourself to a cipher. You must be humble enough to see that in spite of your greatness and gigantic intellect, you are but a speck in the universe. A merely intellectual conception of the things of life is not enough. It is the spiritual conception which eludes the intellect, and which alone can give one satisfaction. Even monied men have critical periods in their lives; though they are surrounded by everything that money can buy and affection can give, they find at certain moments in their lives utterly distracted. It is in these moments that we have a glimpse of God, a vision of Him who is guiding every one of our steps in life. It is prayer.'

*Dr. Fabri:* You mean what we might call a true

religious experience which is stronger than intellectual conception. Twice in life I had that experience, but I have since lost it. But I now find great comfort in one or two sayings of Buddha: '*Selfishness is the cause of sorrow.*' '*Remember, monks, everything is fleeting.*' To think of these takes almost the place of belief.

*Gandhiji*: That is prayer.<sup>11</sup>

### Why We Pray

IF God is, it is our duty to worship Him even if we recognize Him as Truth. We tend to become what we worship. That is the whole and comprehensive meaning of prayer. Truth abides in the human heart. But we realize it indifferently or not at all. Sincere prayer is the key to such realization.<sup>12</sup>

In my opinion, *Rama*, *Rahman*, *Ahurmazda*, God or *Krishna* are all attempts on the part of man to name that Invincible Force which is the greatest of all forces. It is inherent in man, imperfect though he be, ceaselessly to strive after perfection. In the attempt, he falls into reverie. And, just as a child tries to stand, falls down again and again and ultimately learns how to walk, even so man, with all his intelligence, is a mere infant as compared to the Infinite and Ageless God. This may appear to be an exaggeration, but is not. Man can only describe God in his own poor language. The Power we call God defies description. Nor does that Power stand in need of any human effort to describe Him. It is man who requires the means whereby he can describe that Power which is vaster than the ocean.

If this premise is accepted, there is no need to ask why we pray. Man can only conceive God within the limitations of his own mind. If God is vast and boundless as the ocean, how can a tiny drop like man imagine what He is? He can only experience what the ocean is like, if he falls into and is merged in it. This realization

is beyond description. In Madame Blavatsky's language, man, in praying, worships his own glorified self. He can truly pray who has the conviction that God is within him. He who has not, need not pray. God will not be offended.

But I can say from experience that he who does not pray is certainly a loser. What matters then whether one man worships God as Person and another as Force? Both do right according to their lights. None knows and perhaps never will know what is the absolutely proper way to pray. The ideal must always remain the ideal. One need only remember that God is the Force among all the forces. All other forces are material. But God is the Vital Force or Spirit which is all-pervading, all-embracing and, therefore, beyond human ken.<sup>13</sup>

### *God and His Attributes*

WHEN a human being praises God, he imagines Him to be such as he thinks fit. The God of his imagination is there for him. Even when we pray to a God devoid of form and attributes, we do, in fact, endow Him with attributes.\* And attributes, too, are form. Fundamentally, God is indescribable in words. We mortals must of necessity depend upon the imagination which makes and sometimes mars us, too. The qualities we attribute to God with the purest of motives are true for us but fundamentally false, because all attempts at describing Him must be unsuccessful. I am intellectually conscious of this and still I cannot help dwelling upon the attributes of God. My intellect can exercise no influence over my heart.

I am prepared to admit that my heart in its weakness hankers after a God with attributes. The *shlokas* which

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\*"God is formless. Man imagines Him in various forms."



I have been reciting every day for the last fifteen years give me peace and hold good for me. In them, I find beauty as well as poetry. Learned men tell many stories about Saraswati, Ganesh and the like, which have their own use. I do not know their deeper meaning, as I have not gone into it, finding it unnecessary for me. It may be that my ignorance is my salvation. I did not see that I needed to go deep into this as a part of my quest of Truth. It is enough that I know my God, and although I have still to realize His living presence, I am on the right path to my destination.<sup>14</sup>

### *What Prayer Means*

PRAYER literally means to ask for something, that is, to ask God for something in a spirit of humility. Here it is not used in that sense, but in the sense of praising or worshipping God, meditation and self-purification.

But who is God ? God is not some person outside ourselves or away from the universe. He pervades everything, and is omniscient as well as omnipotent. He does not need any praise or petitions. Being immanent in all beings, He hears everything and reads our innermost thoughts. He abides in our hearts and is nearer to us than the nails are to the fingers. What is the use of telling Him anything ?

It is in view of this difficulty that prayer is further paraphrased as self-purification. When we speak out aloud at prayer time, our speech is addressed not to God but to ourselves, and is intended to shake off our torpor. Some of us are intellectually aware of God, while others are afflicted by doubt. None has seen Him face to face. We desire to recognize and realize Him, to become one with Him, and seek to gratify that desire through prayer.

This God whom we seek to realize is Truth. Or, to put it in another way, Truth is God. This Truth is not

merely the truth we are expected to speak. It is that which alone is, which constitutes the stuff of which all things are made, which subsists by virtue of its own power, which is not supported by anything else but supports everything that exists. Truth alone is eternal, everything else is momentary. It need not assume shape or form. It is pure Intelligence as well as pure Bliss. We call it *Ishwara* because everything is regulated by its will. It and the Law it promulgates are one. Therefore, it is not a blind law. It governs the entire universe.

To propitiate this Truth is prayer, which, in effect, means an earnest desire to be filled with the spirit of Truth. This desire should be present all the twenty-four hours. But our souls are too dull to have this awareness day and night. Therefore, we offer prayers for a short time in the hope that a time will come when all our conduct will be one continuously sustained prayer.

In heartfelt prayer, the worshipper's attention is concentrated on the object of worship, so much so that he is not conscious of anything else besides. The worshipper has well been compared to a lover. The lover forgets the whole world and even himself in the presence of the beloved. The identification of the worshipper with God should be closer still. It comes only after much striving, self-suffering (*tapas*) and self-discipline. In a place which such a worshipper sanctifies by his presence, no inducements need be offered to people for attending prayers, as they are drawn to the house of prayer by the force of his devotion.<sup>15</sup>

### *Prayer Purifies the Heart*

PRAYER does for the purification of the mind what the bucket and the broom do for the cleaning up of our physical surroundings.... No matter whether the prayer we recite is the Hindu prayer or the Muslim or the Parsi,

its function is essentially the same, namely, purification of the heart.\*

God has innumerable names, but the most beautiful and suitable, in my opinion, is Truth. Let Truth, therefore, rule every action of our life, be it ever so insignificant. If we eat only to sustain the body as an instrument of His service, not only will it make our bodies and minds healthy and clean, but the inner cleanliness will be reflected in our surroundings also.

As with the individual, so with society. The various functions in the human body have their parallel in the corporate life of society. What I have said about the inner and outer cleanliness of the individual, therefore, applies to the whole society. In the mighty world, man, considered as an animal, occupies but an insignificant place. Physically, he is a contemptible worm. But God has endowed him with intellect and the faculty of discrimination between good and evil. If we use this faculty to know God, we become a power for good. Abuse of that talent converts us into an instrument of evil, so that we become like scourge and a plague and fill this earth with strife and bloodshed, and unhappiness and misery.

The struggle between the forces of good and evil is ceaseless and eternal. The former have Truth and *Ahimsa* as weapons against the latter's falsehood, violence and brute force. There is nothing more potent in the universe than God's Name. If we enthrone Him in our hearts and keep Him there always, we shall know no fear and lay for ourselves rich treasure in life.<sup>16</sup>

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\*"Prayer ought to result in self-purification and it ought to transmute our entire conduct. If anybody thinks that it gives him licence to do as he likes during the rest of the day, he deceives himself and others. That is a travesty of the true meaning of prayer."

—From a Prayer Speech: Jan. 4, 1946.

*'Thy Will Be Done!'*

THERE is really only one prayer that we may offer :  
"Thy will be done!"

Someone will ask: Where is the sense in offering such a prayer? The answer is: Prayer should not be understood in a gross sense. We are aware of the presence of God in our heart, and in order to shake off attachment, we, for the moment, think of God as different from ourselves and pray to Him. That is to say, we do not wish to go where our wayward will may lead us, but where the Lord takes us. We do not know whether it is good to live or to die. Therefore, we should not take delight in living, nor should we tremble at the thought of death. We should be equiminded towards both.

This is the ideal. It may be long before we reach it, and only a few of us can attain it. Even then, we must keep it constantly in view, and the more difficult it seems of attainment, the greater should be the effort we put forth.<sup>17</sup>

## CHAPTER XVII

### PERSONAL TESTIMONY ON PRAYER

**Q.** WILL you give your personal testimony on prayer, not a theoretical discourse, but a narration of what you have felt and experienced as a result of prayer?

**A.** Prayer has been the saving of my life. Without it, I should have been a lunatic long ago. My autobiography will tell you that I have had my fair share of the bitterest public and private experiences. They threw me into temporary despair, but if I was able to get rid of it, it was because of prayer. Now I may tell you, that prayer has not been part of my life in the sense that Truth has been. It came out of sheer necessity, as I found myself in a plight when I could not possibly be happy without it. And the more my faith in God increased, the more irresistible became the yearning for prayer. Life seemed to be dull and vacant without it.

I had attended the Christian service in South Africa, but it had failed to grip me. I could not join them in prayer. They supplicated God, but I could not do so. I failed egregiously. I started with disbelief in God and prayer, and until at a late stage in life I did not feel anything like a void in life. But at that stage I felt that as food was indispensable for the body, so was prayer indispensable for the soul.\* In fact, food for the body is not so necessary as prayer for the soul. For, starvation is often necessary in order to keep the body in health, but there is no such thing as prayer-starvation. You cannot possibly have a surfeit of prayer.

Three of the greatest teachers of the world—Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed—have left unimpeachable testimony,

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\*"Prayer is the food of the soul as bread is of the body."

—*Harijan*: Sept. 28, 1947.



that they found illumination through prayer and could not possibly live without it. But to come nearer home. Millions of Hindus and Mussalmans and Christians find their only solace in life in prayer. Either you vote them down as liars or self-deluded people. Well, then, I will say that this lying has a charm for me, a Truth-seeker, if it is 'lying' that has given me that mainstay or staff of life, without which I could not bear to live for a moment.

In spite of despair staring me in the face on the political horizon, I have never lost my peace. In fact, I have found people who envy my peace. That peace, I tell you, comes from prayer. I am not a man of learning, but I humbly claim to be a man of prayer. I am indifferent as to the form. Everyone is a law unto himself in that respect. But there are some well-marked roads, and it is safe to walk along the beaten tracks, trod by the ancient teachers. Well, I have given my practical testimony. Let everyone try and find that as a result of daily prayer he adds something new to his life, something with which nothing can be compared.<sup>1</sup>

### *'When Helpers Fail and Comforts Flee'*

ON all occasions of trial, He has saved me. In all my trials—of a spiritual nature, as a lawyer, in conducting institutions, and in politics—I can say that God has saved me. When every hope is gone, 'when helpers fail and comforts flee,' I find that help arrives somehow, from I know not where. Supplication, worship, prayer are no superstition; they are acts more real than the acts of eating, drinking, sitting or walking. It is no exaggeration to say that they alone are real, all else is unreal.

Such worship or prayer is no flight of eloquence; it is no lip-homage. It springs from the heart. If, therefore, we achieve that purity of the heart when it is 'emptied of all but love', if we keep all the chords in proper tune, they 'trembling pass in music out of sight'. Prayer needs

no speech. It is in itself independent of any sensuous effort. I have not the slightest doubt that prayer is an unfailing means of cleansing the heart of passions. But it must be combined with the utmost humility.<sup>2</sup>

The object of prayer is not to praise God who does not want our prayers or praise, but to purify ourselves. God is omnipresent. There is not an atom in the universe without His presence. The process of self-purification consists in a conscious realization of His presence within us. There is no strength greater than that which such realization gives.... Presence of God has to be felt in every walk of life.<sup>3</sup>

Let no one ask what is prayer and where and who is God. Both prayer and belief in God are supremely acts of faith. Prayer is the result of realization of our helplessness and our final reliance upon God to the exclusion of all else. Let us then pray if we have faith in God. Though we may know Him by thousand names, He is one and the same to us all.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Eternal Duel*

MAN'S destined purpose is to conquer old habits, to overcome the evil in him and to restore good to its rightful place. If religion does not teach us how to achieve this conquest, it teaches us nothing. But there is no royal road to success in this the truest enterprise in life. Cowardice is, perhaps, the greatest vice from which we suffer and is also possibly the greatest violence, certainly far greater than bloodshed and the like that generally go under the name of violence. For, it comes from want of faith in God and ignorance of His attributes.... I can give my own testimony and say that a heartfelt prayer is undoubtedly the most potent instrument that man possesses for overcoming cowardice and all other bad old habits. Prayer is an impossibility without a living faith in the presence of God within.

Christianity and Islam describe the same process as a duel between God and Satan, not outside but within; Zoroastrianism as a duel between Ahurmazd and Ahriman; Hinduism as a duel between forces of good and forces of evil. And to pray to God is nothing but that sacred alliance between God and man whereby he attains his deliverance from the clutches of the prince of darkness.

But a heartfelt prayer is not a recitation with the lips. It is a yearning from within which expresses itself in every word, every act, nay, every thought of man. When an evil thought successfully assails him, he may know that he has offered but a lip prayer, and, similarly, with regard to an evil word escaping his lips or an evil act done by him. Real prayer is an absolute shield and protection against this trinity of evils. Success does not always attend the very first effort at such real, living prayer. We have to strive against ourselves, we have to believe in spite of ourselves, because months are as our years. We have, therefore, to cultivate illimitable patience if we will realize the efficacy of prayer. There will be darkness, disappointment and even worse; but we must have courage enough to battle against all these and not succumb to cowardice. There is no such thing as retreat for a man of prayer.

What I am relating is not a fairy tale. I have not drawn an imaginary picture. I have summed up the testimony of men who have by prayer conquered every difficulty in their upward progress, and I have added my own humble testimony that the more I live the more I realize how much I owe to faith and prayer which is one and the same thing for me. And I am quoting an experience not limited to a few hours, or days or weeks, but extending over an unbroken period of nearly 40 years. I have had my share of disappointments, uttermost darkness, counsels of despair, counsels of caution, subtlest

assaults of pride; but I am able to say that my faith,—and I know that it is still little enough, by no means as great as I want it to be,—has ultimately conquered every one of these difficulties up to now.

If we have faith in us, if we have a prayerful heart, we may not tempt God, may not make terms with Him. We must reduce ourselves to a cipher.... A man of devotion reduces himself to zero. Not until we have reduced ourselves to nothingness, can we conquer the evil in us: God demands nothing less than complete self-surrender as the price for the only real freedom that is worth having. And when a man thus loses himself, he immediately finds himself in the service of all that lives. It becomes his delight and his recreation. He is a new man, never weary of spending himself in the service of God's creation.<sup>5</sup>

### *Prayer of the Helpless*

EVER since my childhood, prayer has been my solace and my strength. I am told that there is despair and depression everywhere, that there is disappointment all round.... The hymn (from Surdas) alludes to the story of the Lord of Elephants who was in the jaws of a crocodile and who had been all but drowned in water. There was only the tip of his trunk left above water when he invoked God's Name and he was saved. No doubt, it is an allegory. But it conceals a truth. Over and over again in my life have I found it. Even in darkest despair, when there seems no helper and no comfort in the wide, wide world, His Name inspires us with strength and puts all doubts and despair to flight. The sky may be overcast... with clouds, but a fervent prayer to Him is enough to dispel them. It is because of prayer that I have known no disappointment.... I know all that is happening about me, and if anyone must give way to despair, it should be I. But I have known no despair. Why then should you give way to it? Let us pray that He may cleanse our hearts



of pettinesses, meannesses and deceit, and He will surely answer our prayers. Many I know have always turned to that unfailing Source of Strength.<sup>6</sup>

*Necessity for Prayer*

Q. Sir, whilst you start with belief in God, we start with unbelief. How are we to pray?

A. It is beyond my power to induce in you a belief in God. There are certain things which are self-proved, and certain which are not proved at all. The existence of God is like a geometrical axiom. It may be beyond our heart-grasp. I shall not talk of an intellectual grasp. Intellectual attempts are, more or less, fallacious, as a rational explanation cannot give you the faith in a living God. For, it is a thing beyond the grasp of reason. It transcends reason.

There are numerous phenomena from which you can reason out the existence of God, but I shall not insult your intelligence by offering you a rational explanation of that type. I would have you brush aside all rational explanation and begin with a simple child-like faith in God. If I exist, God exists. With me it is a necessity of my being, as it is with millions. They may not be able to talk about it, but from their life you can see that it is part of their life. I am only asking you to restore the belief that has been undermined.

In order to do so, you have to unlearn a lot of literature that dazzles your intelligence and throws you off your feet. Start with the faith, which is also a token of humility and an admission that we know nothing, that we are less than atoms in this universe. We are less than atoms, I say, because the atom obeys the law of its being, whereas we, in the insolence of our ignorance, deny the law of Nature. But I have no argument to address to those who have no faith.



Once you accept the existence of God, the necessity for prayer is inescapable. Let us not make the astounding claim that our whole life is a prayer, and, therefore, we need not sit down at a particular hour to pray. Even men, who were all their time in tune with the Infinite, did not make such a claim. Their lives were a continuous prayer, and yet for our sake, let us say, they offered prayer at set hours, and renewed each day the oath of loyalty to God. God, of course, never insists on the oath, but we must renew our pledge every day, and I assure you we shall then be free from every imaginable misery in life.<sup>7</sup>

### *Prayer and Intercession*

Q. What is your method of worship?

A. We have joint worship morning and evening. We have a recitation of verses from the *Gita* and other accepted religious books, also hymns of saints with or without music. Individual worship cannot be described in words. It goes on continuously and even unconsciously. There is not a moment when I do not feel the presence of a Witness whose eye misses nothing and with whom I strive to keep in tune. I do not pray as Christian friends do. Not because I think there is anything wrong in it, but because words won't come to me. I suppose it is a matter of habit.

Q. Is there any place for supplication in your prayer?

A. There is and there is not. God knows and anticipates our wants. The Deity does not need my supplication, but I, a very imperfect human being, do need His protection as a child that of its father. And yet I know that nothing that I do is going to change His plans. You may call me a fatalist, if you like.

Q. Do you find any response to your prayer?

A. I consider myself a happy man in that respect.

I have never found Him lacking in response. I have found Him nearest at hand when the horizon seemed darkest—in my ordeals, in jails when it was not all smooth-sailing for me. I cannot recall a moment in my life when I had a sense of desertion by God.<sup>8</sup>

### *Efficacy of Prayer*

WRITING to a friend on this very matter prayer, I came across a beautiful thing from Tennyson which I present to the readers, if, perchance, I might convert them to a definite belief in the efficacy of prayer. Here is the gem :

*"More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For, what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friends?  
For, so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by golden chains about the feet of God."*<sup>9</sup>

Prayer brings a peace, a strength and a consolation that nothing else can give. But it must be offered from the heart. When it is not offered from the heart, it is like the beating of a drum, or just the vocal effect of the throat sounds. When it is offered from the heart, it has the power to melt mountains of misery. Those who want are welcome to try its power.<sup>10</sup>

### *Food for the Soul*

PRAYER is even more essential for the well-being of the soul than is food for the maintenance of the body. It becomes necessary to give up food on occasions in order to benefit the body. But prayer may never be abandoned. If we provide food for the body which is perishable, then, surely, it is our primary duty to provide food for the soul

which is imperishable and such sustenance is found in prayer. The real meaning of prayer is devoted worship.<sup>11</sup>

I should like to ask you all to take to the practice of rising early in the morning and commencing the day with prayer, and finishing the day with prayer before retiring. Do it with the members of your family, if you cannot get your neighbours to join; and if you cannot get the members of your family to do so, do it alone. If you will cultivate the practice, you will find for yourselves what a peace-giving thing a prayer from the heart is, and you will find that it will steady you. And a day begun under such happy auspices will invariably end well.<sup>12</sup>

Heart-felt prayer steadies one's nerves, humbles one and clearly shows one the next step.<sup>13</sup>

In the morning you should have what I call internal wash, that is to say, the first thing you should do on getting up is to take *Ramnama* and then pray to God that you should pass the day in sacredness, so that no wrong word may pass your lips and no wrong act may be done by you. And then you should give yourselves an external wash.<sup>14</sup>

Water is an emblem of purity. Just as we purify the body by bathing with water, so can we become pure in heart by a morning wash, i.e., by taking the name of God.<sup>15</sup>

Internal sanitation consists in taking the name of God—the first thing to be done after getting up in the morning. That is the breakfast for the soul.<sup>16</sup>

We have to learn to appreciate our prayers and make them an instrument of the Beatific Vision. We must derive our daily spiritual nutrition from them. Let us not think of changes but pour our whole soul into them, such as they are.<sup>17</sup>

Far more indispensable than food for the physical body is spiritual nourishment for the soul. One can do

without food for a considerable time, but a man of the spirit cannot exist for a single second without spiritual nourishment.<sup>18</sup>

### *Man Cannot Live Without Prayer*

AS food is necessary for the body, prayer is necessary for the soul. A man may be able to do without food for a number of days—as Macswinney did for over 70 days—but, believing in God, man cannot, should not, live a moment without prayer. You will say that we see lots of people living without prayer. I dare say they do, but it is the existence of the brute which for man is worse than death. I have not the shadow of a doubt that the strife and quarrels with which our atmosphere is so full today are due to the absence of the spirit of the true prayer. You will demur to the statement, I know, and contend that millions of Hindus, Mussalmans and Christians do offer their prayers. It is because I had thought you would raise this objection that I used the words 'true prayer'.

The fact is, we have been offering our prayers with the lips but hardly ever with our hearts, and it is to escape, if possible, the hypocrisy of the lip-prayer, that we in the *Ashram* repeat every evening the last verses of the Second Chapter of the *Bhagvad Gita*. The condition of the 'Equable in Spirit' that is described in those verses, if we contemplate them daily, is bound slowly to turn our hearts towards God. If you would base your education on the true foundation of a pure character and pure heart, there is nothing so helpful as to offer your prayers every day truly and religiously.<sup>19</sup>

### *Silent Prayer*

PRAYER is for remembering God and for purifying the heart and can be offered even when observing silence.<sup>20</sup>

My faith is increasing in the efficacy of silent prayer.



It is by itself an art—perhaps the highest art requiring the most refined diligence.<sup>21</sup>

As I believe that silent prayer is often mightier than any overt act, in my helplessness I continuously pray in the faith that the prayer of a pure heart never goes unanswered. And with all the strength at my command, I try to become a pure instrument for acceptable prayer.<sup>22</sup>

I greatly admire silent prayers. We must devote a part of our time to such prayers. They afford peace of mind. I have experienced this in my own life. Notwithstanding my manifold activities, I devote as much time as possible to prayer.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Voice of Silence*

ALL thought does not possess the same potency. Only thought crystallized by a pure life and charged with prayerful concentration has potency. The purer the life, the greater the concentration, the brighter the faith in that Unseen Power from whom all things are, the greater the potency of thought. If I had the purity, the concentration and the faith I want, I know that I would do all my work without speech or writing, or with the least use of either; and the power the thought would then carry would be irresistible. That is the power which every human being has to aspire to and with due effort can attain. The voice of silence has never been denied.<sup>24</sup>

‘सुन री सखी मोहन की यह बांसरी पियारी’ (*Sun ri sakhi Mohan ki yeh bansri piyari*). I am very fond of this *Bhajan* (song) for the richness of the content. It describes how Lord Krishna played the flute and the *Gopis* went into exultation over it. God, described as *Krishna*, resides in everyone’s heart which is likened to the silent forest. *Gopis* are the human family. The refrain of the *Bhajan* is that we are to listen to the voice of the silence even in the midst of the din and the noise of the battle of life. All men and women are *Gopis* before God. If



we are to listen to the silence within, outward silence is of utmost necessity. If we are in tune with the Infinite, we will not move from our place even though bullets may rain over us.<sup>25</sup>

### *A Part of Spiritual Discipline*

EXPERIENCE has taught me that silence is a part of the spiritual discipline of a votary of Truth. Proneness to exaggerate, to suppress or modify the truth, wittingly or unwittingly, is a natural weakness of man, and silence is necessary in order to surmount it. A man of few words will rarely be thoughtless in his speech; he will measure every word.<sup>26</sup>

It has often occurred to me that a seeker after Truth has to be silent. I know the wonderful efficacy of silence. I visited a Trappist monastery in South Africa. A beautiful place it was. Most of the inmates of that place were under a vow of silence. I inquired of the Father the motive of it and he said the motive was apparent: "We are frail human beings. We do not know very often what we say. If we want to listen to the 'still small voice' that is always speaking within us, it will not be heard if we continually speak." I understood that precious lesson. I know the secret of silence.<sup>27</sup>

Silence is a great help to a seeker after Truth like myself. In the attitude of silence, the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest after Truth, and the soul requires inward restfulness to attain its full height.<sup>28</sup>

### *A Spiritual Necessity*

GANDHIJI: It (silence) has now become both a physical and spiritual necessity for me. Originally, it was taken to relieve the sense of pressure. Then I wanted time for writing. After, however, I had practised it for

some time, I saw the spiritual value of it. It suddenly flashed across my mind that that was the time when I could best hold communion with God. And now I feel as though I was naturally built for silence. Of course, I may tell you that from my childhood I have been noted for my silence. I was silent at school and in my London days I was taken for a silent drone by friends.

*Dr. Mott:* In this connection, you put me in mind of two texts from the *Bible*:

*'My soul, be thou silent unto God.'*

*'Speak Lord, for Thy servant hearkeneth.'*

I have often sought silence for communion even during my noisiest time. I have had recourse to sea voyages for this purpose, though, of course, the radio has now robbed even a sea voyage of the privilege of silence one used to enjoy on the boat. But silent prayer is not a monologue, but a dialogue, and God speaks to us only when we are silently ready to listen to Him.<sup>29</sup>

### *Communion of Silence*

EMPTYING of the mind of all conscious process of thought and filling it with the spirit of God unmanifest, brings one ineffable peace and attunes the soul with the Infinite. I agree that if a man could practise the presence of God all the twenty-four hours, there would be no need for a separate time for prayer. When the mind is completely filled with His spirit, one cannot harbour ill-will or hatred towards anyone, and, reciprocally, the enemy will shed his enmity and become a friend. It is not my claim that I have always succeeded in converting enemies into friends, but in numerous cases it has been my experience that when the mind is filled with His peace, all hatred ceases. An unbroken succession of world teachers, since the beginning of time, have borne testimony to the same. I claim no merit for it. I know it is due entirely to God's grace. Let us then seek His

grace through the communion of silence, and maybe the experience will abide with us ever afterwards.<sup>30</sup>

### *Value of Silence*

SILENCE is looked upon as a very important thing among our people. *Samadhi* means silence. *Muni* (sage) and *mauna* (sagehood, silence) are both derived from the same root. It is true that when we practise silence, at first many thoughts enter our minds and we even begin to doze. Silence is intended to remedy these defects. We are accustomed to talk much and hear loud sounds. Silence, therefore, seems difficult. A little practice, however, enables us to like it, and when we like it, it gives us a sense of ineffable peace. We are seekers of Truth. We must, therefore, understand what silence means and observe it accordingly. We can certainly take *Ramanama* during silence. The fact is that we should prepare the mind for it. We shall realize its value if we bestow a little thought on it.<sup>31</sup>

### *Silence of the Sewn-Up Lips*

SILENCE of the sewn-up lips is no silence. One may achieve the same result by chopping off one's tongue, but that, too, would not be silence. He is truly silent who, having the capacity to speak, utters no idle word. ... Ponder over Kabir's song :

*"Oh, good man! Natural communion is best.  
Ever since, by the grace of God, it was achieved, it  
has been growing.*

*Wherever I wander, it is a circuit round the  
Deity; whatever I do, is an act of service; every  
lying down of mine is an act of prostration before  
God.*

*Every utterance of mine is God's name—I worship  
no other God—and all hearing is a remembrance of  
God.*

*Eating and drinking are acts of worship, and living in a house or in the wilderness are the same to me.*

*I shut not my eyes, neither do I stuff my ears; to no torture do I subject myself.*

*I open my eyes to find nothing but the beautiful manifestation of God everywhere to greet and delight me.*

*My mind ever intent on Him, all corrupt thought has left me; so very much I am engrossed in contemplation of Him, that there is no room for aught else.*

*Kabir says: This is a state to be silently enjoyed, but I have dared to sing about it. It is a state beyond misery and bliss, I am merged in it."*<sup>32</sup>

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

**S**PEAKING for myself, I can say that I can do, and have often done, without food for days on end, but I cannot do without prayers even for a single day. Individual prayer is there; but no one should fight shy of collective prayer. Man is a social being. If men and women can eat together, play together and work together, why should they not pray together? Why should anyone feel the need to pray away from everybody's gaze? Is there anything sinful or shameful in prayer that it should not be said in public?

For close on 50 years, I have been a believer in public prayer. From my earliest days in South Africa, I had among my associates and co-workers men and women of every religion—Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis—who all used to join me in the prayer. In India, men and women in crowds attend my prayers wherever I go. I have been told that they do not come to attend the prayers; they come just to have my *darshan*. Even if it is so, they come because they want to join me—a man of prayer.

I am aware that I have not come as near to God as I want to. My realization of Truth and *Ahimsa* is still far from perfect, otherwise there would be no need for me to use speech. My very being would radiate Truth and *Ahimsa*, so that you would be able to see it on my face and feel its presence. I have often said that the perfect *Ahimsa* of one individual is quite enough for the whole world. Whatever measure of success I have attained in the realization of Truth and Non-violence, is the result of prayer.

Prayer should be a spontaneous upwelling of the heart. One should not pray if one feels that the prayer



is a burden. God is not hungry for man's prayer or praise. He tolerates all because He is all Love. If we feel that we owe a debt to Him, Who is the Giver of all things, we should remember Him and pray to Him out of sheer gratitude. The fear of incurring anybody's ridicule or displeasure should never deter one from performing one's elementary duty towards the Maker.<sup>1</sup>

### *Co-operative Prayer*

THE object of our attending prayers is to commune with God and turn the searchlight inwards so that, with God's help, we can overcome our weaknesses.

I believe that one imbibes pure thought in the company of the pure. Even if there is only one pure man, the rest would be affected by that one man's purity. The condition is that we attend the prayers with that intention, otherwise our coming to the prayers is meaningless.

I go further and maintain that even if we all had our weaknesses, but came to the (prayer) meeting with the intention of removing them, our collective effort made from day to day would quicken the progress of reform. For, even as co-operation in the economic or political field is necessary, so is co-operation much more necessary on the moral plane. That is the meaning of the prayer meetings which I have been holding since my return to India.

I, therefore, appeal to you to sit absolutely quiet with your eyes closed, so as to shut yourselves off from outside thoughts for a few minutes at least. This co-operative prayer needs no fasts, no advertisement. It must be free from hypocrisy.<sup>2</sup>

### *How to Think of God?*

Q. You say that the rule should be that during prayers, everyone should sit with closed eyes and think

of nothing but God. The question arises as to how and in what form we have to think of God?

A. True meditation consists in closing the eyes and ears of the mind to all else, except the object of one's devotion. Hence the closing of eyes during prayers is an aid to such concentration. Man's conception of God is naturally limited. Each one has, therefore, to think of Him as He best appears to him, provided that the conception is pure and uplifting.<sup>3</sup>

### *Mass Prayer*

Q. Is it possible during prayers for thousands who assemble at your prayer gatherings, to concentrate their minds on anything whatever?

A. I can only answer 'yes'. For, if I did not believe in mass prayer, I should cease to hold public prayers. My experience confirms my belief.<sup>o</sup> Success depends upon the purity of the leader and the faith of the audience. I know instances in which the audience had faith and the leader was an impostor. Such cases will continue to happen. But Truth, like the sun, shines in the midst of the darkness of untruth. The result, in my case, will be known probably after my death.<sup>4</sup>

### *Collective Prayer*

Q. You believe in mass prayer. Is congregational worship, as practised today, a true prayer? In my opinion, it is a degrading thing and, therefore, dangerous. Jesus said: "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, but enter into thine inner chamber

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<sup>o</sup>"The congregational prayer is having a magical effect. I am witnessing it every day. The crowds run into thousands—some times hundreds upon thousands. Yet there is perfect order and pin-drop silence during the prayer—no jostling, no noise. "It is a revelation."

and having shut thy door pray to the Father which is in secret." Most people in a crowd are inattentive and unable to concentrate. Prayer, then, becomes hypocrisy. The *Yogi* is aware of this. Should not the masses, therefore, be taught self-examination which is the true prayer?

A. I hold that congregational worship held by me is true prayer for a collection of men. The convener is a believer and no hypocrite. If he were one, the prayer would be tainted at the source. The men and women who attend do not go to any orthodox prayer house, from which they might have to gain an earthly end. The bulk of them have no contact with the convener. Hence, it is presumed, they do not come for show. They join it because they believe that they, somehow or other, acquire merit by having common prayer. That most or some persons are inattentive or unable to concentrate, is very true. That merely shows that they are beginners. Neither inattention nor inability to concentrate are any proof of hypocrisy or falsity. It would be, if they pretended to be attentive when they were not. On the contrary, many have often asked me what they should do, when they are unable to concentrate.

The saying of Jesus, quoted in the question, is wholly inapplicable. Jesus was referring to individual prayer and to hypocrisy underlying it. There is nothing in the verse quoted against collective prayer. I have remarked often enough that without individual prayer, collective prayer is not of much use.\* I hold that individual prayer is a prelude to collective, as the latter, when it is effective, must lead to the individual. In other words, when a man has got to the stage of heart-prayer, he prays always, whether in the secret or in the multitude.

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\*"The secret of collective prayer is that the emanation of silent influence from one another helps in the realization of one's goal."

I do not know what the questioner's *Yogi* does or does not. I know that the masses, when they are in tune with the Infinite, naturally resort to self-examination. All real prayer must have that end.<sup>5</sup>

### *Best Place for Congregational Worship*

GOD is omnipresent. Our bodies are the real temples rather than buildings of stone. The best place for congregational worship for any religion, in my opinion, is in the open with the sky above as the canopy and Mother Earth below for the floor.<sup>6</sup>

The open *maidan* (ground) is truly the best temple of God. The rich and the poor, the master and the servant, the millionaire and the labourer, the Hindu, the Muslim, the Parsi and the Christian, can all take part in the worship which takes place in this temple, which has the sky for its canopy and Mother Earth for the floor. No one can jostle another from such a place. There is room enough and to spare for all and sundry.

I never think, of course, that we will become holy by going into a temple. It depends upon our faith and belief. If a man worships Shiva, and he goes to a temple of Shiva, he should not feel uneasy. If we go to a temple where God is installed and come back from the temple and then indulge in wine and vice, then our going to the temple is absolutely useless.<sup>7</sup>

## CHAPTER XIX

### TEMPLES AND IDOL WORSHIP

**A** CONGREGATIONAL prayer is a mighty thing. What we do not often do alone, we do together.... It is a common experience for men who have no robust faith to seek the comfort of congregational prayer. All who flock to churches, temples, or mosques are not scoffers or humbugs. They are honest men and women. For them congregational prayer is like a daily bath,\* a necessity of their existence. These places of worship are not a mere idle superstition to be swept away at the first opportunity. They have survived all attacks up to now and are likely to persist to the end of time.<sup>1</sup>

These places of worship to me are not merely brick and mortar. They are but a shadow of Reality. Against every church and every mosque and every temple destroyed, hundreds have risen in their places. It is wholly irrelevant to the argument about the necessity of prayer that the so-called believers have belied their belief, and that many places renowned for their sacred character have been razed to the ground. I hold it to be enough, and it is enough for my argument, if I can prove that there have been men in the world, and there are men today in existence, for whom prayer is positively the bread of life. I recommend the practice of going unobserved to mosques, temples and churches, without any preconceived ideas. I have discovered that there is something in them which appeals to the heart and which transforms those

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\*"It (congregational prayer) brings us all together with God. It is a real purifying bath. Just as the body becomes dirty without a bath, so also the pure soul appears impure unless the heart is washed with the water of prayer. Therefore, never miss prayers."



who go there, not for show, not out of shame or fear, but out of simple devotion. It defies analysis. Nevertheless, the fact stands that pure-minded people going to the present places of pilgrimage, which have become hot-beds of error, superstition, and even immorality, return from them purer for the act of worship. Hence the significant assurance in the *Bhagavad Gita*: 'I make return according to the spirit in which men worship Me.'<sup>2</sup>

*Bridges Between the Unseen and Ourselves*

THESE temples are so many bridges between the Unseen, Invisible and Indefinable God and ourselves who are infinitesimal drops in the Infinite Ocean. We, the human family, are not all philosophers. We are of the earth very earthy, and we are not satisfied with contemplating the Invisible God. Somehow or other, we want something which we can touch, something which we can see, something before which we can kneel down. It does not matter whether it is a book, or an empty stone building, or a stone building inhabited by numerous figures. A book will satisfy some, an empty building will satisfy some others, and many others will not be satisfied unless they see something inhabiting these empty buildings. Then I ask you to approach these temples not as if they represented a body of superstitions. If you will approach these temples with faith in them, you will know each time you visit them you will come away from them purified, and with your faith more and more in the living God.<sup>3</sup>

It depends upon our mental condition whether we gain something or do not gain anything by going to the temples. We have to approach these temples in a humble and penitent mood. They are so many houses of God. Of course, God resides in every human form, indeed in every particle of His creation, everything that is on this earth. But since we, very fallible mortals, do not appreciate the fact that God is everywhere, we impute special sanctity

to temples and think that God resides there. And so when we approach these temples, we must cleanse our bodies, our minds and our hearts and we should enter them in a prayerful mood and ask God to make us purer men and purer women for having entered their portals.<sup>4</sup>

It will not do to say that sinful people cannot be allowed to enter temples. Temples are like spiritual hospitals, and the sinful, who are spiritually diseased, have the first right to be ministered unto by them. Temples are for sinners, not for saints. And who is to judge where no man is without sin? We declare every day in our prayers: पापोऽहं पापकर्माहम् । (I am sinful, I am a doer of sinful deeds). So, if the temples are intended only for the sinless, they will have to bar their doors in the face of all mankind.<sup>5</sup>

### *Worship of God*

IT is being more and more demonstrated that it is the worship of God, be it in the crudest manner possible, which distinguishes man from the brute. It is the possession of that additional quality which gives him such enormous hold upon God's creation. It is wholly irrelevant to show that millions of educated people never enter a church, mosque, or temple. Such entry is neither natural nor indispensable for the worship of God. Those even who bow their heads before stocks and stones, who believe in incantations or ghosts, acknowledge a Power above and beyond them. It is true that this form of worship is savage, very crude; nevertheless, it is worship of God. Gold is still gold though in its crudest state. It merely awaits refinement to be treated as gold even by the ignorant. No amount of refinement will turn iron ore into gold. Refined worship is doubtless due to the effort of man. Crude worship is as old as Adam, and, as natural to him as eating and drinking, if not more natural. A man may live without eating for days on end, he does

not live without worship for a single minute. He may not acknowledge the fact, as many an ignorant man may not acknowledge the possession of lungs or the fact of the circulation of blood.<sup>6</sup>

### *Neither a Sin Nor a Superstition*

I DO not regard the existence of temples as a sin or superstition. Some form of common worship, and a common place of worship appear to be human necessity.

Whether the temples should contain images or not, is a matter of temperament and taste. I do not regard a Hindu or a Roman Catholic place of worship containing images as necessarily bad or superstitious, and a mosque or a Protestant place of worship as good or free of superstition merely because of their exclusion of images. A symbol such as a Cross or a book may easily become idolatrous and, therefore, superstitious. And the worship of the image of Child Krishna or Virgin Mary may become ennobling and free of all superstition. It depends upon the attitude of the heart of the worshipper.<sup>7</sup>

Temples are to Hindus what churches are to Christians. In my opinion, we are all idolaters ; that in Hinduism we have images of stone or metal inside temples makes to me no difference. Thousands of Hindus who visit temples in simple faith derive precisely the same spiritual benefit that Christians visiting churches in simple faith do. Deprive a Hindu of his temple, and you deprive him of the thing he generally prizes most in life. That superstition and even evil have grown round many Hindu temples is but too true. That, however, is an argument for temple reform, not for lowering their value for Harijans or any Hindu. It is my certain conviction that temples are an integral part of Hinduism.<sup>8</sup>

### *Houses of God*

SOME priests are bad. Temples, churches and mosques

very often show corruption, more often deterioration. Nevertheless, it would be impossible to prove that all priests are bad or have been bad and that all churches, temples and mosques are hot-beds of corruption and superstition. Nor does the argument take note of this fundamental fact that no Faith has done without a habitation; and I go further that in the very nature of things it cannot exist, so long as man remains as he is constituted. His very body has been rightly called the temple of the Holy Ghost, though innumerable such temples belie the fact and are hot-beds of corruption used for dissoluteness. And I presume that it will be accepted as a conclusive answer to a sweeping suggestion that all bodies should be destroyed for the corruption of many, if it can be shown, as it can be, that there are some bodies which are proper temples of the Holy Ghost. The cause for the corruption of many bodies will have to be sought elsewhere. Temples of stone and mortar are nothing else than a natural extension of these human temples, and though they were in their conception undoubtedly habitations of God-like human temples, they have been subject to the same law of decay as the latter.

I know of no religion or sect that has done or is doing without its house of God, variously described as a temple, mosque, church, synagogue or *agiari*. Nor is it certain that any of the great reformers, including Jesus, destroyed or discarded temples altogether. All of them sought to banish corruption from temples as well as from society. Some of them, if not all, appear to have preached from temples. I have ceased to visit temples for years, but I do not regard myself on that account as a better person than before. My mother never missed going to the temple when she was in a fit state to go there. Probably, her faith was far greater than mine, though I do not visit temples. There are millions whose faith is sus-



tained through these temples, churches and mosques. They are not all blind followers of a superstition, nor are they fanatics. Superstition and fanaticism are not their monopoly. These vices have their root in our hearts and minds.

To reject the necessity of temples is to reject the necessity of God, religion and earthly existence.<sup>9</sup>

### *A Beautiful Exercise of Faith*

TEMPLE going is for the purification of the soul. The worshipper draws the best out of himself. In greeting a living being, he may draw the best out of the person greeted, if the greeting is selfless. A living being is, more or less, fallible like onself. But in the temple, one worships the living God, perfect beyond imagination. Letters written to living persons often end in heart-breaking, even when they are answered, and there is no guarantee of their being always answered. Letters to God who, according to the devotee's imagination, resides in temples, require neither pen nor ink nor paper, not even speech. Mere mute worship constitutes the letter which brings its own unfailing answer. The whole function is a beautiful exercise of faith. Here there is no waste of effort, no heart-breaking, no danger of being misunderstood. The writer must try to understand the simple philosophy lying behind the worship in temples or mosques or churches. He will understand my meaning better if he will realize that I make no distinction between these different abodes of God. They are what faith has made them. They are an answer to man's craving somehow to reach the UNSEEN.

Temple worship supplies the felt spiritual want of the human race. It admits of reform. But it will live as long as man lives.<sup>10</sup>



*Idol Worship*

I DO not disbelieve in idol-worship. An idol does not excite any feeling of veneration in me. But I think that idol-worship is part of human nature. We hanker after symbolism. Why should one be more composed in a church than elsewhere? Images are an aid to worship. No Hindu considers an image to be God. I do not consider idol-worship a sin.<sup>11</sup>

I am both an idolater and an iconoclast in what I conceive to be the true senses of the terms. I value the spirit behind idol-worship. It plays a most important part in the uplift of the human race. And I would like to possess the ability to defend with my life the thousands of holy temples which sanctify this land of ours.

I am an iconoclast in the sense that I break down the subtle form of idolatry in the shape of fanaticism that refuses to see any virtue in any other form of worshipping the Deity save one's own. This form of idolatry is more deadly for being more fine and evasive than the tangible and gross form of worship that identifies the Deity with a little bit of a stone or a golden image.<sup>12</sup>

Idols become what the devotees make of or impute to them.<sup>13</sup>

I myself am an iconoclast, but I have equal regard for the so-called idolaters. Those who worship idols also worship the same God who is everywhere, even in a clod of earth, even in a nail that is pared off.<sup>14</sup>

*Idolatry vs. Idol Worship*

IDOLATRY is bad, not so idol-worship. An idolater makes a fetish of his idol. An idol worshipper sees God even in a stone and, therefore, takes the help of an idol to establish his union with God. Every Hindu child knows that the stone in the famous temple in Benaras is not Kashi Vishwanath. But he believes that the Lord of

the Universe does reside specially in that stone. This play of the imagination is permissible and healthy.\* Every edition of the *Gita* on a bookstall has not that sanctity which I ascribe to my own copy. Logic tells me there is no more sanctity in my copy than in any other. The sanctity is in my imagination. That imagination brings about marvellous concrete results. It changes men's lives. I am of opinion that, whether we admit it or not, we are all idol-worshippers or idolaters, if the distinction I have drawn is not allowed. A book, a building, a picture, a carving are, surely, all images in which God does reside, but they are not God. He who says they are, errs.<sup>15</sup>

### *Tree Worship*

I AM both a supporter and opponent of image-worship. When image-worship degenerates into idolatry and becomes encrusted with false beliefs and doctrines, it becomes a necessity to combat it as a gross social evil. On the other hand, image-worship, in the sense of investing one's ideal with a concrete shape, is inherent in man's nature, and even valuable as an aid to devotion. Thus, we worship an image when we offer homage to a book which we regard as holy or sacred. We worship an image when we visit a temple or a mosque with a feeling of sanctity or reverence. Nor do I see any harm in all this. On the contrary, endowed as man is with a finite, limited understanding, he can hardly do otherwise.† Even so,

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\*"Idolatry is permissible in Hinduism when it subserves an ideal. It becomes a sinful fetish when the idol itself becomes the ideal."

—*Young India*: June 21, 1928.

†"The question, whether image-worship is or is not necessary, does not arise, for it has been and will be there all along. Human beings can only be image-worshippers. It is possible that some change is necessary in the modes of worship. God is everywhere, and, therefore, in the image also. It is impossible to do away with image-worship."

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: p. 196.

far from seeing anything inherently evil or harmful in tree worship, I find in it a thing instinct with a deep pathos and poetic beauty. It symbolizes true reverence for the entire vegetable kingdom, which, with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes and forms, declares to us, as if it were, with a million tongues the greatness and glory of God. Without vegetation, our planet would not be able to support life even for a moment. In such a country, especially, therefore, in which there is a scarcity of trees, tree worship assumes a profound economic significance.

I, therefore, see no necessity for leading a crusade against tree worship. It is true that the poor simple-minded women who offer worship to trees have no reasoned understanding of the implications of their act. Possibly, they would not be able to give any explanation as to why they perform it. They act in the purity and utter simplicity of their faith. Such faith is not a thing to be despised; it is a great and powerful force that we should treasure.

Far different, however, is the case of vows and prayers which votaries offer before trees. The offering of vows and prayers for selfish ends, whether offered in churches, mosques, temples or before trees and shrines, is a thing not to be encouraged. Making of selfish requests or offering of vows is not related to image-worship as effect and cause. A personal selfish prayer is bad, whether made before an image or an unseen God.

Let no one, however, from this undersand me to mean that I advocate tree worship in general. I do not defend tree worship because I consider it to be a necessary aid to devotion, but only because I recognize that God manifests Himself in innumerable forms in this universe, and every such manifestation commands my spontaneous reverence.<sup>16</sup>

## CHAPTER XX

### THE ASHRAM PRAYER

THE Ashram prayer\* has become very popular. Its development has been spontaneous. The birth and growth of this prayer has not been artificial. There is a history attached to almost every *Shloka* and every selected *Bhajan*. The *Bhajanvali* contains, among others, *Bhajans* from Muslim *Sufis* and *Fakirs*, from Guru Nanak, and from the Christian Hymnary. Every religion seems to have found a natural setting in the prayer book.

Chinese, Burmese, Jews, Ceylonese, Muslims, Parsis, Europeans and Americans have all lived in the *Ashram* from time to time. In the same way, two Japanese *Sadhus* came to me in Maganwadi in 1935. One of them was with me till the other day when War broke out with Japan. He was an ideal inmate of our home in Sevagram. He took part in every activity with zest. I never heard of his quarrelling with anyone. He was a silent worker. He learnt as much Hindi as he could. He was a strict observer of his vows. Every morning and evening he could be seen going round with his drum and heard chanting his *mantra*. The evening worship always commenced with his *mantra* 'नम्यो हो रेंगे क्यों।' which means "I bow to the 'Buddha, the giver of true religion.' I shall never forget the quickness, the orderliness, and utter detachment with which he prepared himself the day the police came without notice to take him away

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\*"At the morning prayer we first recite the *Shlokas* (verses) printed in *Ashram Bhajanavali* (hymnal), and then sing one *Bhajan* (hymn) followed by *Ramadhun* (repetition of *Ramanama*) and *Gita* (recitation of the *Gita*). In the evening we have recitation of the last 19 verses of the Second Chapter of the *Gita*, one *Bhajan* and *Ramadhun*, and then read some portion of a sacred book."



from the *Ashram*. He took leave of me after reciting his favourite *mantra* and left his drum with me. "You are leaving us, but your *mantra* will remain an integral part of our *Ashram* prayer," were the words that came spontaneously to my lips. Since then, in spite of his absence, our morning and evening worship has commenced with the *mantra*. For me, it is a constant reminder of Sadhu Keshav's purity and single-eyed devotion. Indeed, its efficacy lies in that sacred memory.

While Sadhu Keshav was still with us, Bibi Raihana Tyabji also came to stay at Sevagram for a few days. I knew her to be a devout Muslim but was not aware, before the death of her illustrious father, of how well-versed she was in *Quran Sharif*. When that jewel of Gujarat, Tyabji Saheb, expired, no sound of weeping broke the awful silence in his room. The latter echoed with Bibi Raihana's sonorous recitation of verses from the *Quran*. Such as Abbas Tyabji Saheb cannot die. He is ever alive in the example of national service which he has left behind. Bibi Raihana is an accomplished singer with an ample repertory of *Bhajans* of all kinds. She used to sing daily as well as recite beautiful verses from the *Quran*. I asked her to teach some verses to any of the inmates who could learn them, and she gladly did so. Like so many who come here, she had become one of us. Raihana went away when her visit was over, but she has left a fragrant reminder of herself. The well-known *al Fateha* has been included in the *Ashram* worship. The following is a translation of it :

1. "I take refuge in Allah from Satan the accursed.
2. Say : He is God, the one and only God,  
the Eternal, Absolute ;  
He begetteth not, nor is He begotten ;  
And there is none like unto Him.
3. Praise be to God,



*The Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds,  
Most Gracious, most Merciful,  
Master of the Day of Judgment;  
Thee do we worship,  
And Thine aid we seek;  
Show us the straight way,  
The way of those on whom  
Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace,  
Those whose (portion) is not wrath  
And who go not astray."*

I am writing this note in reply to an ardent Hindu friend who has thus gently reproached me: 'You have now given the *Kalma* a place in the *Ashram*. What further remains to be done to kill your Hinduism ?'

I am confident that my Hinduism and that of the other *Ashram* Hindus has grown thereby. There should be in us an equal reverence for all religions. Badshah Khan,\* whenever he comes, joins in the worship here with delight. He loves the tune to which the *Ramayana* is sung, and he listens intently to the *Gita*. His faith in Islam has not lessened thereby. Then why may I not listen to the *Quran* with equal reverence and adoration in my heart ?

*Rama* is not known by only a thousand names. His names are innumerable, and He is the same whether we call Him *Allah*, *Khuda*, *Rahim*, *Razzak*, the Bread-giver, or any name that comes from the heart of a true devotee.<sup>1</sup>

### *Rama and Rahim*

\* Q. If both *Rahim* and *Rama* are names of God, why use the two ? Would not only *Rama* suffice ?

A. God is supposed to have a thousand names in the Hindu scriptures. What if He has 40 crores of names ?

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\*Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

It is open to everyone to call Him by as many names as he wants to for his spiritual satisfaction. I am accused of trying to please the Muslims. If I do, what harm is there? Some Muslims might want to hurt me, but that does not mean that I am to hurt them in return. It was a Muslim girl—Raihana Tyebji—who had taught me the verse from the *Quran Sharif* and I can never give it up. When I broke my last fast in jail, Dr. Gilder recited a verse from the *Zend Avesta*, and ever since the Parsi verse has also been included in my prayers. By using these prayers and singing the *Ramadhun* as I do, I do not take away from, but add to, the glory of the name of Rama.<sup>2</sup>

### *Refuge in God*

*"In order to escape from the evil one,*

*I seek refuge in God.*

*Oh God! I begin every task*

*With the remembrance of Thy name.*

*Thou art the Compassionate and the Merciful.*

*Thou art the Creator of the Universe.*

*Thou art Lord and Master.*

*I praise Thee alone and desire only Thy help.*

*Thou wilt mete out justice on the Day of Judgment.*

*Show me the right path, the path*

*Which Thy saints have trod,*

*Not the wrong path of those who have offended Thee.*

*God is one.*

*He is Eternal, All-Powerful, Uncreate.*

*There is none other like Him.*

*He has created all things.*

*None has created Him."*

This is the translation of the verses read daily from the *Quran Sharif*. It passes my comprehension how any one can object to their recitation. I affirm that the en-

shrinement of this prayer in our hearts only can uplift and make better men and women of us.

### *Singing of Ramadhun*

IT becomes a man to remember his Maker all the twenty-four hours. If that cannot be done, we should at least congregate at prayer time to renew our covenant with God. Whether we are Hindus or Mussalmans, Parsis, Christians or Sikhs, we all worship the same God. Congregational prayer is a means for establishing the essential human unity through common worship. Mass singing of *Ramadhun* and the beating of *tal* are its outward expression. If they are not a mechanical performance but are an echo of the inner unison, as they should be, they generate a power and an atmosphere of sweetness and fragrance which has only to be seen to be realized.

In the Police and the Army, physical drill and training in the use of arms are regarded as an essential part of discipline. Military training includes marching in step and executing of movements to order in the mass noiselessly and harmoniously, too. The mass singing of *Ramadhun* and the accompaniment of *tal* are as much a part of discipline in non-violence as physical drill and training in the use of arms are that of military discipline.<sup>4</sup>

Those who have some experience know the power that the *Ramadhun*, meaning recital of God's Name from the heart, means. I know what the power that lakhs of soldiers marching in step to the tune of their band means. The desolation that the military prowess has wrought in the world, he who runs can see. Though the war is said to have ended, the aftermath is worse than actual warfare. Such is the bankruptcy of military power.

Without the slightest hesitation, I am here to contend that the power exerted by the *Ramadhun* recited by millions of mankind with true beat of time, is different

in kind from, and infinitely superior to, the display of military strength. And this recital of God's Name from the heart would produce lasting peace and happiness in the place of the present desolation we witness.<sup>5</sup>

The singing of *Ramadhun* is the most important part of congregational prayer. The millions may find it difficult to correctly recite and understand the *Gita* verses and the Arabic and *Zend Avesta* prayers, but everybody can join in chanting *Ramanama* or God's Name. It is as simple as it is effective. Only it must proceed from the heart. In its simplicity lies its greatness and the secret of its universality. Anything that millions can do together becomes charged with a unique power. I am here to testify that when it is sung in tune to the accompaniment of *tal*, the triple accord of the voice, the accompaniment and thought creates an atmosphere of ineffable sweetness and strength which no words can describe.<sup>6</sup>

All might find it difficult to correctly recite the *Gita* verses which are in Sanskrit. But all can take part in the singing of *Ramadhun*. The mass singing of *Ramadhun* to the accompaniment of *tal* is prayer reduced to its simplest terms.<sup>7</sup>

## CHAPTER XXI

### RAMANAMA

**R**AMANAMA to me is all-sufficing. There are as many names of God as His manifestations, but sages have, as a result of their life-long penance, devised names to be uttered by the devotees, in order to be able to commune with the Nameless. There are other *mantras* than *Ramanama*, but for me that is supreme. It has become part of my life. When a child, my nurse taught me to repeat *Ramanama* whenever I felt afraid or miserable, and it has been second nature with me with growing knowledge and advancing years. I may even say that the Word is in my heart, if not actually on my lips, all the twenty-four hours. It has been my saviour and I am ever stayed on it. In the spiritual literature of the world, the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas takes a foremost place. It has charms that I miss in the *Mahabharata* and even in Valmiki's *Ramayana*.<sup>1</sup>

*Rama*, *Allah* and God are to me convertible terms. Millions of Hindus know Him under the name of *Rama*. As a child, I was taught to call upon *Rama* when I was seized with fear. I know many of my companions to whom *Ramanama* has been the greatest solace in the hour of their need. I present it to the reader whose vision is not blurred and whose faith is not damped by overmuch learning. Learning takes us through many stages in life, but it fails us utterly in the hour of danger and temptation. Then, faith alone saves. *Ramanama* is not for those who tempt God in every way possible and ever expect it to save. It is for those who walk in the fear of God, who want to restrain themselves and cannot in spite of themselves.<sup>2</sup>

What I learnt in my childhood has become a huge



thing in my mental firmament. It (*Ramanama*) is a sun that has brightened my darkest hour. A Christian may find the same solace from the repetition of the name of Jesus, and a Muslim from the name of *Allah*. All these things have the same implications and they produce identical results under identical circumstances. Only the repetition must not be a lip expression, but part of your very being.<sup>3</sup>

The *Allah* of Islam is the same as the God of Christians and *Ishwara* of Hindus. Even as there are numerous names of God in Hinduism, there are many names of God in Islam. The names do not indicate individuality but attributes; and little man has tried in his humble way to describe mighty God by giving Him attributes, though He is above all attributes, Indescribable, Immeasurable.<sup>4</sup>

God has many names. Each person can choose the name that appeals most to him. *Ishwara*, *Allah*, *Khuda*, God mean the same. But the recitation must not be parrot-like, it must be born of faith of which endeavour will be some evidence.<sup>5</sup>

Mere utterance parrot-like of the names of God is of no avail.<sup>6</sup>

I have been a devotee of Tulsidas from my childhood and have, therefore, always worshipped God as *Rama*. But I know that if, beginning with *Omkar*, one goes through the entire gamut of God's names current in all climes, all countries and all languages, the result is the same. He and His Law are one. To observe His Law is, therefore, the best form of worship. A man who becomes one with the Law does not stand in need of vocal recitation of the name. In other words, an individual with whom contemplation on God has become as natural as breathing is so filled with God's spirit that knowledge

or observance of the Law becomes second nature, as it were, with him.

The question, then, arises as to why, in spite of having this prince of remedies at hand, we know so little about it; and why even those who know, do not remember Him or remember Him only by lip service, not from the heart. Parrot-like repetition of God's name signifies failure to recognize Him as the panacea for all ills.

*Ramanama* is no copy-book maxim. It is something that has to be realized through experience.<sup>7</sup>

### *Potency of Ramanama*

RAMANAMA is the most potent weapon. Let no one wonder at it. The recitation of *Ramanama* as a remedy for spiritual ailments is as old as the hills. But the greater includes the less. And my claim is that the recitation of *Ramanama* is a sovereign remedy for our physical ailments also.

The potency of *Ramanama* is, however, subject to certain conditions and limitations. *Ramanama* is not like black magic. If some one suffers from surfeit and wants to be cured of its after-effects so that he can again indulge himself at the table, *Ramanama* is not for him. *Ramanama* can be used only for a good, never for an evil end, or else thieves and robbers would be the greatest devotees. *Ramanama* is for the pure in heart and for those who want to attain purity and remain pure. It can never be a means for self-indulgence. The remedy for surfeit is fasting, not prayer. Prayer can come in only when fasting has done its work. It can make fasting easy and bearable. Similarly, the taking of *Ramanama* will be a meaningless farce when at the same time you are drugging your system with medicines. A doctor who uses his talent to pander to the vices of his patient, degrades himself and his patient. What worse degradation can there be for man than that,

instead of regarding his body as an instrument of worshipping his Maker, he should make it the object of adoration and waste money like water to keep it going anyhow. *Ramanama*, on the other hand, purifies while it cures, and, therefore, it elevates. Therein lies its use as well as its limitation.<sup>8</sup>

The efficacy of *Ramanama* would depend on whether it is or is not backed by a living faith. If you are subject to anger, eat and sleep for indulgence, not solely for sustenance, you do not know the meaning of *Ramanama*. Your recitation of it is mere lip service. *Ramanama*, to be efficacious, must absorb your entire being during its recitation and express itself in your whole life.<sup>9</sup>

### *Ramanama and Charms*

TO take *Ramanama* from the heart means deriving help from an Incomparable Power. The atom bomb is as nothing compared with it. This Power is capable of removing all pain. It must, however, be admitted that it is easy to say that *Ramanama* must come from the heart, but to attain the reality is very difficult. Nevertheless, it is the biggest thing man can possess.<sup>10</sup>

Physical ailments are not always the most serious. Those born of anger, lust, greed, infatuation etc., are worse. Bad as is the loss of a limb, the loss of reason would be worse. *Ramanama*, when it is uttered not merely by the lips, but proceeds from the heart, is the sovereign remedy for the triple woe to which a man is subject. Reason follows the heart. It does not guide it. A pure heart is thus the most essential requisite not only for the mental health, but for physical, too; and that could be had only through waiting on God—repeating *Ramanama*.

No remedy on earth can cure all physical ailments. But *Ramanama* enables one to put up with suffering bravely and calmly when it cannot cure. *Ramanama* also

stands for the natural and right way of living.<sup>11</sup>

Mere repetition of *Ramanama* possesses no mysterious virtue as such. *Ramanama* is not like black magic. It has to be taken with all that it symbolizes. Rather, it is like a mathematical formula which sums up in brief the result of endless research. Mere mechanical repetition of *Ramanama* cannot give strength. For that, one has to understand and live up to the conditions attaching to its recitation. To take God's Name, one has to live a godly life.<sup>12</sup>

*Ramanama* recited from the heart is the never-failing remedy for all the ills — physical, mental or spiritual. One thing is clear. If a man or a woman who claims to recite *Bamanama* from the heart is always ailing or is given to outbursts of anger, the claim is eventually unproved.

Tolstoy has said that if man dismisses God from his heart even for a single moment, Satan occupies the vacancy. *Ramanama* would expel Satan. Honest men and women have said to me that with all their efforts they cannot say that *Ramanama* comes to them from the heart. My reply to them is that they must go on and have infinite patience. A boy requires at least 16 years' hard study in order to become a doctor. How much more time must be necessary to establish *Ramanama* in the heart?<sup>13</sup>

### *Faith Cure vs. Ramanama*

RAMANAMA has the flavour of faith-healing and Christian Science; yet, it is quite distinct from them. Recitation of *Ramanama* is a mere symbol of the Reality for which it stands. If one is knowingly filled with the presence of God within, one is that moment free from all ailment — physical, mental or moral. That we do not see the type in life is not to disprove the truth of the statement. My argument is admittedly useless for those who have no faith in God.



Christian scientists, faith-healers and psycho-therapists may, if they will, bear witness somewhat to the truth underlying *Ramanama*. I cannot take the reader a long way with me through reason. How is one to prove to a person who has never tasted sugar that sugar is sweet, except by asking him to taste it?<sup>14</sup>

Unscrupulous men will abuse *Ramanama*, as they will any other thing or system. Mere lip recitation of *Ramanama* has nothing to do with cure. Faith cure, if I know it correctly, is blind cure. The living name of the living God is not a figment of one's imagination. It has to come from the heart. It is conscious belief in God and a knowledge of His Law that make perfect cure possible without any further aid. That Law is that a perfect mind is responsible for perfect health of the body. A perfect mind comes from a perfect heart, not the heart known by a doctor's stethoscope, but the heart which is the seat of God. It is claimed that realization of God in the heart makes it impossible for an impure or an idle thought to cross the mind. Disease is impossible where there is purity of thought. Such a state may be difficult to attain. But the first step in the ascent to health is taken with its recognition. The next is taken when the corresponding attempt is made. This radical alteration in one's life is naturally accompanied by the observance of all other Nature's laws hitherto discovered by man. One cannot play with them and claim to have a pure heart. It can be said with justice that possession of a pure heart should do equally well without *Ramanama*. Only, I know no other way of attaining purity. And it is the way trodden by the sages of old all over the world. They were men of God, not superstitious men or charlatans.

If this is Christian Science, I have no quarrel with it. The way of *Ramanama* is not my discovery. It is probably



much older than the Christian era.

A correspondent questions whether *Ramanama* avoids *bona fide* surgical operations. Of course, it does not. It cannot restore a leg that is cut off in an accident. In many cases, surgical operations are unnecessary. Where they are required, they should be performed. But a man of God will not worry if a limb is lost. Recitation of *Ramanama* is neither an empirical method, nor a make-shift.<sup>15</sup>

*Ramanama* cannot perform the miracle of restoring to you a lost limb. But it can perform the still greater miracle of helping you to enjoy an ineffable peace \* in spite of the loss while you live, and rob death of its sting and the grave its victory at the journey's end. Since death must come soon or late to everyone, why should one worry over the time?<sup>16</sup>

### *My Rama*

I LAUGH within myself when someone objects that *Rama* or the chanting of *Ramanama* is for the Hindus only, how can Mussalmans, therefore, take part in it? Is there one God for the Mussalmans and another for the Hindus, Parsis or Christians? No, there is only one omnipotent and omnipotent God. He is named variously and we remember Him by the name which is most familiar to us.†

My *Rama*, the *Rama* of our prayers, is not the historical *Rama*, the son of Dashratha — the King of Ayodhya. He is the eternal, the unborn, the one without a second. Him alone I worship, His aid alone I seek, and so should

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\* "There is no greater spell-binder of peace than the name of God."  
—*Press Report* : Jan. 10, 1946.

† "*Ramanama* is another name of *Khuda* or God. I want my Muslim brothers to understand that the God of the Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and all other communities of the world is one. To me, all religions are of equal status. Different religions are different leaves of the same tree."

— *Press Report* : Jan. 8, 1947.

you. He belongs equally to all. I, therefore, see no reason why a Mussalman or anybody should object to taking His name. But he is in no way bound to recognize God as *Ramanama*. He may utter to himself *Allah* or *Khuda* so as not to mar the harmony of the sound.<sup>17</sup>

You may say you do not believe in Him. You do not know that but for His will you could not draw a single breath. Call Him *Ishwara*, *Allah*, God, *Ahura Mazda*. His names are as innumerable as there are men. He is one without a second. He alone is great. There is none greater than He. He is timeless, formless, stainless. Such is my *Rama*. He alone is my Lord and Master.<sup>18</sup>

I ask you to accept the slavery of the one Omnipotent God no matter by what name you address Him. Then, you would bend the knee to no man or men. It is ignorance to say that I couple *Rama*, a mere man, with God. I have repeatedly made it clear that my *Rama* is the same as God. My *Rama* was before, is present now and will be for all time. He is Unborn and Uncreated.<sup>19</sup>

"Is not this '*Rama*' the same as the son of Dasha-ratha?"

Tulsidas has answered this question. But let me put down my own view.

More potent than *Rama* is the Name. Hindu *dharma* is like a boundless ocean, teeming with priceless gems. The deeper you dive, the more treasures you find. In Hindu religion, God is known by various names. Thousands of people look doubtless upon *Rama* and *Krishna* as historical figures and literally believe that God came down in person on earth in the form of *Rama*, the son of Dasharatha, and by worshipping him one can attain salvation. The same thing holds good about *Krishna*. History, imagination and truth have got so inextricably mixed up. It is next to impossible to disentangle them. I have accepted all the names and forms attributed to God as

symbols connoting one formless, omnipresent *Rama*. To me, therefore, *Rama* described as the Lord of Sita, son of Dasharatha, is the All-powerful Essence whose name inscribed in the heart removes all suffering — mental, moral and physical.<sup>20</sup>

### *What is Rama ?*

YOU ask: 'What is *Rama*?' I may explain to you the meaning of that word, but then your repetition of that name would be nearly fruitless. But if you understand that *Rama* is He whom you intend to worship and then repeat His name, it will serve the purposes of the Cow of Plenty for you. You may repeat it like a parrot, but still it will be helpful because your repetition, unlike the parrot's, is backed by a purpose. Thus you do not need any symbol, and Tulsidas holds that the name of *Rama* is more powerful than *Rama* himself and suggests that there is no relation between the word *Rama* and its meaning. The meaning will be filled in later by the devotee in accordance with the nature of his devotion. That is the beauty of this repetition (*japa*). Otherwise, it would be impossible to prove that it will make a new man even of a simpleton. The devotee must fulfil only a single condition. The name should not be repeated for show or with a view to deceiving others, but with determination and faith. If a man perseveres with such repetition, I have not the shadow of a doubt that it will be for him a universal provider.

Everyone who has the requisite patience can realize this in his own case. For days, and sometimes for years, the mind wanders and becomes restless, the body craves for sleep when one is engaged in repeating the Name. Indeed, even still more painful symptoms intervene. Still, if the seeker perseveres with the repetition, it is bound to bear fruit. Spinning is a gross material accomplishment,

and yet it can be acquired only after our patience is sorely tried. Things more difficult than spinning demand a greater effort on our part. Therefore, he who is out to attain the Supreme must undergo the necessary discipline for a long, long time and never be down-hearted. If you have faith, repeat the name at all times, when you sit or stand or lie down, eat or drink. There is no reason to despair if the whole of your life-time is spent while you are at it. If you try it, you will have peace of mind in an increasing measure from day to day.<sup>21</sup>

### *Beauty and Power of Ramanama*

YOU must learn to take the name of *Rama* with full devotion and faith. When you study the *Ramayana*, you will learn from Tulsidas the divine power of that blessed name.

You might ask me why I tell you to use the word '*Rama*' and not one of the many other names of the Creator. True, His names are as many as, and more than, the leaves on a tree, and I might, for instance, ask you to use the word God. But what meaning, what associations would it have for you here? In order to enable you to feel anything when repeating the word God, I should have to teach you some English. I should have to explain to you the foreign peoples' thoughts and associations.

But, in telling you to repeat the name of *Rama*, I am giving you a name worshipped since countless generations by the people of this land — a name familiar to the very animals and birds, the very trees and stones of Hindustan through many thousand years. You know the story of Ahalya? No, I see you don't. But you will soon learn it when you study the *Ramayana* — learn how a stone by the road-side sprung to life at the touch of *Rama's* foot as he passed by. You must learn to repeat the blessed

name of *Rama* with such sweetness and such devotion that the birds will pause in their singing to listen to you — that the very trees will bend their leaves towards you, stirred by the divine melody of that Name.

In His sweet name lies a power which can cure all our ills.<sup>22</sup>

The name '*Rama*' has a miraculous power, if it is repeated from a faithful and pure heart.

### *Rama — The Son of Dasharatha*

Q. How can the *Rama* whom you believe to be immortal, be *Rama*, the son of Dasharatha and the husband of Sita?

A. This question was raised by Saint Tulsidas himself and answered by him. The answer cannot, in reality, be reasoned out. It does not lend itself to intellectual satisfaction. It is a matter of heart speaking to heart. I worshipped *Rama* as Sita's husband in the first instance, but as my knowledge and experience of Him grew, my *Rama* became immortal and omnipresent. This does not mean that *Rama* ceased to be Sita's husband; but the meaning of Sita's husband expanded with the vision of *Rama*. This is how the world evolves. *Rama* cannot become omnipresent for the man who regards him merely as the son of Dasharatha. But for the believer in *Rama* as God, the father of the omnipresent *Rama* also becomes omnipresent — the father and son become one. It may be said that this is all a matter of imagination. 'To each man according to his faith,' is all that I can say. If all religions are one at source, we have to synthesize them. Today, they are looked upon as separate and that is why we kill each other. When we are tired of religion, we become atheists and then, apart from the little self, nothing, not even God, exists. But when we acquire true understanding, the little self perishes and God becomes



all in all. *Rama*, then, is and is not the son of Dasharatha, the husband of Sita, the brother of Bharata and Lakshmana and yet is God, the unborn and eternal. All honour, then, to those who not believing in *Rama* as the son of Dasharatha still come to join in the collective prayers. This matter of *Rama* is one which transcends reason. I have merely tried to give to the reader my belief for what it is worth.<sup>24</sup>

### *First and the Last Remedy*

*RAMA*, whose name I prescribe as the infallible remedy for all ills, is neither the historical *Rama* nor the *Rama* of those who use the name as a charm or black magic. *Rama* whose name I prescribe as a cure-all is God, by taking whose name devotees attain purity and peace; and I claim that it is the one infallible remedy for all ailments whether mental, spiritual or physical. It is, of course, possible to cure physical ailments by going to doctors and *Vaidyas*. But *Ramanama* enables one to become one's own doctor or *Vaidya* and to find the elixir of healing within oneself. Even when the ailment cannot be cured, because physically it is incurable, it enables one to endure it with equanimity and peace of mind. A person who has faith in *Ramanama* would not run from pillar to post and dance attendance at the doors of celebrated doctors and *Vaidyas* in order to prolong existence anyhow. Nor is *Ramanama* meant to be taken only when the doctors and *Vaidyas* have failed. It is meant to enable one to do without them altogether. For a believer in *Ramanama*, it is the first as well as the last remedy.<sup>25</sup>

These are the conditions under which alone *Ramanama* can become an effective remedy for the three-fold malady — physical, mental and spiritual — to which man is subject:

The first condition is that it should come from the heart. What does that mean? People do not mind going

to the ends of the earth to find a cure for their physical ailments, which are much less important than the mental or spiritual. Man's physical being is after all perishable. It cannot, by its very nature, last for ever. And yet men make a fetish of it while neglecting the immortal spirit within. A man who believes in *Ramanama* would not make a fetish of the body, but would regard it only as a means of serving God. And for making it into a fit instrument for that purpose, *Ramanama* is the sovereign means.

To instal *Ramanama* in the heart requires infinite patience. It may even take ages. But the effort is worthwhile. Even so, success depends solely on the grace of God.

*Ramanama* cannot come from the heart unless one has cultivated the virtues of truth, honesty and purity within and without. Every day at the evening prayers, we repeat the *shlokas* describing the man with a steadfast intellect. Every one of us can become a *sthitaprajna* — man with steadfast intellect — if he keeps his senses under discipline, eats and drinks and allows himself enjoyment and recreation only to sustain life for service. If one has no control over one's thoughts, if one does not mind, for instance, sleeping in a hole of a room with all doors and windows shut, and breathing foul air or drinking dirty water, his recitation of *Ramanama* is in vain.

That, however, does not mean that one should give up reciting *Ramanama* on the ground that one has not the requisite purity. For, recitation of *Ramanama* is also a means for acquiring purity. In the case of a man who repeats *Ramanama* from the heart, discipline and self-control will come easy. Observance of the rules of health and hygiene will become his second nature. His life will run an even course. He will never want to hurt anyone. To suffer in order to relieve other's suffering will become a part of his being, and fill him with an ineffable and

perennial joy. Let us, therefore, persevere and ceaselessly repeat *Ramanama* during all our waking hours. Ultimately, it would remain with us even during our sleep and God's grace would then fill us with perfect health of body, mind and spirit.<sup>26</sup>

### *Potency of Silent Thought*

RAMANAMA, however, cannot be taught by word of mouth. But I hold that even more potent than the spoken word is the silent thought. A single right thought can envelop the world. It is never wasted. The very attempt to clothe thought in word or action limits it. No man in this world can express a thought in word or action fully.

That does not mean that one should go into perpetual silence. In theory, that is possible. But it is very difficult to fulfil the condition by which silent thought could be made effective. I for one cannot claim to have attained the requisite intensity or control over thought. I cannot altogether keep out useless or irrelevant thoughts from my mind. It requires infinite patience and *tapasya* to attain that state.

I am not indulging in a figure of speech, but I mean it literally when I say that there is no limit to the potency of *Ramanama*. But in order to experience that, *Ramanama* has to come from a heart that is absolutely pure. I myself am striving to attain that state. I have envisaged it in the mind, but have not fully realized it in practice. When that stage is reached, even the recitation of *Ramanama* would become unnecessary.<sup>27</sup>

I do look forward to a time when even repeating the name of *Rama* will become a hindrance. When I have realized that *Rama* transcends even speech, I shall have no need to repeat the name.<sup>28</sup>

*No Charm Like Ramanama*

RAMANAMA is not for the few : it is for all. He who takes this name lays by a rich store for himself, and it is inexhaustible. The more you draw upon it, the more it increases. It is infinite. As the *Upanishad* says, you take out infinite out of infinite and infinite remains behind. It is the unfailing panacea for all the ills, physical, mental and spiritual to which man is subject. *Ramanama* is only one of the numerous names of God. In fact, there are as many names of God as there are human beings in the world. You may substitute *Krishna* for *Rama*, or you can substitute for it any of His countless names and it will make no difference.\* I myself got the *mantra* of *Ramanama*, from my nurse when I was a child. I used to be frightened of ghosts and evil spirits in the dark. My nurse told me : 'If you repeat *Ramanama*, all the ghosts and evil spirits will vanish'. I accepted her advice with all the unquestioning faith of a child. That cured me of my cowardice. If that is the experience of a child, how much more would the grown-ups stand to gain by it if they repeated *Ramanama* with understanding and faith ?

But the condition is that it must come from the heart. Do evil thoughts possess you, or, are you tormented by lust or greed ? Then, there is no charm against it like *Ramanama*. Supposing you are tempted to amass a big fortune by some easy and dishonest means. If you have faith in *Ramanama*, you will say to yourself : 'Why should I amass for my wife and children riches which they might squander away — why not leave them a legacy in the shape of sound character and sound education and training that will enable them to earn their living by honest industry

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\* "Truth is *Rama*, *Narayana*, *Ishwara*, *Khuda*, *Allah*, God. As Narasinha says : 'The different shapes into which gold is beaten gives rise to different names and forms; but ultimately it is all gold'."



and body labour?' Ceaseless repetition of *Ramanama* will dispel your delusion and false attachment, and the living realization will dawn on you that you were a fool to hanker after millions for the sake of your dear ones, instead of offering them the priceless treasure of His Name which frees one from all bondage and wandering. Filled with the joy of that realization, such a person will tell his wife and children: 'I have not brought for you the treasure I had set out for, but something infinitely richer.' 'Where is it, show it to us?' they will say incredulously. 'It is the Name which is richer than all treasures', he will reply, 'because It quenches the thirst for all riches. It is enshrined in my heart.'<sup>29</sup>

### Vocal Recitation

Q. While in conversation or doing brain work or when one is suddenly worried, can one recite *Ramanama* (the Name of God) in one's heart? Do people do so at such times, and if so, how?

A. Experience shows that man can do so at any time, even in sleep, provided *Ramanama* is enshrined in his heart. If the taking of the Name has become a habit, its recitation through the heart becomes as natural as the heart beat. Otherwise, *Ramanama* is a mere mechanical performance or, at best, has touched the heart only on the surface. When *Ramanama* has established its dominion over the heart, the question of vocal recitation does not arise. Because, then, it transcends speech. But it may well be held that persons who have attained this state are few and far between.

There is no doubt whatsoever that *Ramanama* contains all the power that is attributed to it. No one can, by mere wishing, enshrine *Ramanama* in his heart. Untiring effort is required as also patience. What an amount of labour and patience have been lavished by men to



acquire the non-existent philosopher's stone? Surely, God's Name is of infinitely richer value and always existent.

Q. Is it harmful if, owing to stress or exigencies of work, one is unable to carry out daily devotions in the prescribed manner? Which of the two should be given preference? Service or the rosary?

A. Whatever the exigencies of service or adverse circumstances may be, *Ramanama* must not cease. The outward form will vary according to the occasion. The absence of the rosary does not interrupt *Ramanama* which has found an abiding place in the heart.

Q. Is it not enough to have *Ramanama* in one's heart, or is there something special in its recitation?

A. I believe there is special merit in the recitation of *Ramanama*. If anyone knows that God is in truth residing in his heart, I admit that for him there is no need for recitation. But I have not known such a person. On the contrary, my personal experience tells me that there is something quite extraordinary in the recitation of *Ramanama*. Why or how is not necessary to know.<sup>30</sup>

## CHAPTER XXII

### REPETITION OF GOD'S NAME

**T**HE uttering of the Sacred Name from the heart is enough to ensure the presence and benediction of God. The fact is that God is there all the time, only we do not realize it. The recitation of the Sacred Name, hallowed by the practice of an unbroken line of saints, wakes us from our ignorance and works as infallibly as an electric spark, and immediately makes the presence of God felt in our midst. I say this only for those who have faith. Those who have none should dismiss it from their minds altogether.<sup>1</sup>

In Mira's song, the devotee asks the soul to drink deep of the nectar of God's Name. Physical food and drink result in satiety and, if over-indulged, in illness. But the ambrosia of God's Name knows no such limit. The deeper one drinks of it, the more the thirst for it grows. But it must sink deep into the heart. When that happens, all delusion and attachment, lust and envy, fall off from us. Only, one must persevere and have patience. Success is the inevitable result of such effort.<sup>2</sup>

There are many who, whether from mental laziness or from having fallen into a bad habit, believe that God is and will help us unasked. Why, then, is it necessary to recite His Name? It is true that if God is, He is irrespective of our belief. But realization of God is infinitely more than mere belief. That can come only by constant practice. This is true of all science. How much more true of the Science of all sciences?

Man often repeats the name of God parrot-wise and expects fruit from so doing. The true seeker must have that living faith which will not only dispel the untruth

of parrot-wise repetition from within him, but also from the hearts of others.<sup>3</sup>

### *Nama-Japa*

NAMA-JAPA helps one to conquer sin. One who repeats the Name with a pure heart is full of faith that the repetition is bound to help him in this conquest. To conquer sin, in other words, means self-purification. One who repeats the Name in faith will never tire of it, so that the Name which is at first on the tongue enters the heart and purifies it. This is the universal experience without any exceptions. Even psychologists hold that as a man thinks, so he becomes. This principle applies to *Rama-nama*. I have the fullest faith in *Nama-Japa*. Its discoverer was a man of experience, and I am firmly of opinion that his discovery is extremely important. Purification should be possible even for the illiterate. And here *Nama-Japa* comes in (*Gita* : IX-22; X-10). Telling the beads of a rosary is a help in achieving mental concentration.<sup>4</sup>

It may take time for the recitation to come from the heart, even as a seed sown has to be nurtured and bears fruit only in due season. If the desire to have God within us is there, progress, however slow, is bound to be. Man cannot be transformed from bad to good overnight. God does not exercise magic. He, too, is within His own Law. His Law, however, is different from the law of the State. There may be mistakes in the latter, but God cannot err. If He were to go beyond the limits of His Law, the world would be lost. He is changeless, unchanging, un-equalled, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. His Law is written on the tablets of our hearts. We can become changed men and women, only if we have the desire of reform and if we are prepared for ceaseless endeavour.<sup>5</sup>

### *Beauty of Repetition*

*Ceresole* : This repetition of one and the same thing

over and over again jars on me. It may be the defect of my rationalist mathematical temperament. But, somehow, I cannot like the repetition. For instance, even Bach's wonderful music fails to appeal to me when the text 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,' is repeated over and over again.

*Gandhiji* : But even in mathematics you have your recurring decimals.

*Ceresole* : But each recurs with a definite new fact.

*Gandhiji* : Even so, each repetition, or *japa* as it is called, has a new meaning, each repetition carries you nearer and nearer to God. This is a concrete fact, and I may tell you that you are here talking to no theorist, but to one who has experienced what he says every minute of his life, so much so that it is easier for the life to stop than for this incessant process to stop. It is a definite need of the soul.

*Ceresole* : I quite see it, but for the average man it becomes an empty formula.

*Gandhiji* : I agree, but the best thing is liable to be abused. There is room for any amount of hypocrisy, but even hypocrisy is an ode to virtue. And I know that for ten thousand hypocrites, you would find millions of simple souls who find their solace from it. It is like scaffolding quite essential to a building.

*Ceresole* : But if I may carry the simile a little further, you agree that the scaffolding has to be removed when the building is complete?

*Gandhiji* : Yes, it would be removed when this body is removed.

*Ceresole* : Why?

*Wilkinson* : Because we are eternally building.

*Gandhiji* : Because we are eternally striving after perfection. God alone is perfect, man is never perfect.<sup>6</sup>

*Is Prayer a Mechanical Affair?*

REPEATING the same thing at prayer from day to day is objected to on the ground that it thus becomes mechanical and tends to be ineffective. It is true that the prayer becomes mechanical. We ourselves are machines, and if we believe God to be our mover, we must behave like machines in His hands. If the sun and other heavenly bodies did not work like machines, the universe would come to a standstill. But in behaving like machines, we must not behave like inert matter. We are intelligent beings and must observe rules as such.

The point is not whether the contents of the prayer are always the same or differ from day to day. Even if they are full of variety, it is impossible that they will become ineffective. The *Gayatri* verse among Hindus, the confession of faith (*Kalma*) among Mussalmans, the typical Christian prayer in the *Sermon on the Mount* have been recited by millions for centuries every day; and yet their power has not diminished but is ever on the increase. It all depends upon the spirit behind the recitation. If an unbeliever or a parrot repeats these potent words, they will fall quite flat. On the other hand, when a believer utters them always, their influence grows from day to day. Our staple food is the same. The wheat-eater will take other things besides wheat, and these additional things may differ from time to time, but the wheat bread will always be there on the dining table. It is the eater's staff of life, and he will never weary of it. If he conceives a dislike for it, that is a sign of the approaching dissolution of his body.

The same is the case with prayer. Its principal contents must be always the same. If the soul hungers after them, she will not quarrel with the monotony of the prayer but will derive nourishment from it. She will have a sense of deprivation on the day that it has not been



possible to offer prayer. She will be more downcast than one who observes a physical fast. Giving up food may, now and then, be beneficial for the body; indigestion of prayer for the soul is something never heard of.

The fact is that many of us offer prayer without our soul being hungry for it. It is a fashion to believe that there is a soul; so we believe that she exists. Such is the sorry plight of many among us. Some are intellectually convinced that there is a soul, but they have not grasped that truth with the heart; therefore, they do not feel the need for prayer. Many offer prayer because they live in society and think they must participate in its activities. No wonder, they hanker after variety. As a matter of fact, however, they do not *attend* prayer. They want to enjoy the music or are merely curious or wish to listen to the sermon. They are not there to be one with God.<sup>7</sup>

### *Vain Repetitions*

Q. All agree that mechanical repetition of prayers is worse than useless. It acts as an opiate on the soul. I often wonder why you encourage repetition morning and evening of the eleven great vows<sup>\*</sup> as a matter of routine. May not this have a dulling effect on the moral consciousness of our boys? Is there no better way of inculcating these vows?

A. Repetitions, when they are not mechanical, produce marvellous results. Thus, I do not regard the rosary as a superstition. It is an aid to the pacification of a wandering brain. Daily repetition of the vows falls under different category. It is a daily reminder to the earnest seeker as he rises and retires that he is under the

\*1. Truth. 2. Non-violence. 3. Brahmacharya (continence). 4. Non-Stealing. 5. Non-Possession. 6. Control of the Palate. 7. Fearlessness. 8. Removal of Untouchability. 9. Breed Labour. 10. Equality of Religions. 11. Swadeshi.

eleven vows which are to regulate his conduct. No doubt, it will lose its effect if a person repeats the vows mechanically under the delusion that the mere repetition will bring him merit.

You may ask: 'Why repeat the vows at all? You know, that you have taken them and are expected to observe them.' There is force in the argument. But experience has shown that a deliberate repetition gives stimulus to the resolution. Vows are to the weak mind and soul what tonics are to a weak body. Just as a healthy body needs no tonics, a strong mind may retain its health without the need of vows and the daily reminder thereof. An examination of the vows will, however, show that most of us are weak enough to need their assistance.<sup>8</sup>

## CHAPTER XXIII

### DISCOURSES ON PRAYER

I AM glad you have been coming. For me, it has been both a joy and a privilege, in as much as I have felt its elevating influence. I ask you to keep it up. You may not know the verses, you may not know Sanskrit and the hymns, but *Ramanama* is there for all, the heritage handed down from ages. And I tell you why I ask you to continue this congregational prayer. Man is both an individual and a social being. As an individual, he may have his prayer during all the waking hours; but as a member of society, he has to join in the congregational prayer. I, for one, may tell you that when I am alone I do have my prayer, but I do feel very lonely without a congregation to share the prayer with me. I knew and even now know very few of you, but the fact that I had the evening prayers with you was enough for me. Among the many memories that will abide in my heart after I leave, not the least will be the prayer meetings. But I shall have my congregation at the next place I reach, and forget the wrench. For one, who accepts the brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God, should find a congregation wherever he goes, and he may not hug or nurse the feeling of parting or separation. Please, therefore, keep up the prayer. You can form your own congregation in your own places, and, as a last resource, one's family can become one's congregation well enough. Do meet every evening at this hour, learn a few hymns, learn the *Gita*, do the best and the most you can for the purpose of self-purification.<sup>1</sup>

#### *A Daily Ritual*

LET prayer become a daily obligatory ritual for you.

Prayer plays a large part in a self-purificatory sacrifice and you will see that it will be a veritable Cow of Plenty for you, and will make your way clear. The more you apply yourselves to it, the more fearlessness you will experience in daily life, for fearlessness is a sign and symbol of self-purification. I do not know a man or a woman who was on the path of self-purification and was still obsessed by fear. Generally, there are two kinds of fear in men's minds—fear of death and fear of loss of material possessions. A man of prayer and self-purification will shed the fear of death and embrace death as a boon companion, and will regard all earthly possessions as fleeting and of no account. He will see that he has no right to possess wealth when misery and pauperism stalk the land, and when there are millions who have to go without a meal. No power on earth can subdue a man who has shed these two fears. But, for that purpose, the prayer should be a thing of the heart and not a thing of outward demonstration. It must take us daily nearer to God; and a prayerful man is sure to have his heart's desire fulfilled, for the simple reason that he will never have an improper desire. Continue this ritual and you will shed lustre not only on your city but on our country. I hope this brief prayer of mine will find a lodgement in your hearts.<sup>2</sup>

A person must shed all spiritual dirt at prayer time. As he is ashamed of doing anything immoral while other people are looking on, so should he be in the presence of God. But God knows our every act and every thought. There is not a single moment when we can think any thought or do any act unknown to Him. He who thus prays from the bottom of his heart will in time be filled with the spirit of God and become sinless.<sup>3</sup>

### *Greatest Binding Force*

PRAYER is the greatest binding force, making for the

solidarity and oneness of the human family. If a person realizes his unity with God through prayer, he will look upon everybody as himself. There will be no high, no low, no narrow provincialisms or petty rivalries in the matter of language between an Andhra and a Tamilian, a Kanarese and a Malayalee. There will be no invidious distinction between a touchable and untouchable, a Hindû and a Mussalman, a Parsi, a Christian or a Sikh. Similarly, there would be no scramble for personal gain or power between various groups or between different members within a group.

The outer must reflect the inner. If we are in tune with God, no matter how big a gathering, perfect quiet and order would prevail and even the weakest would enjoy perfect protection. Above all, realization of God must mean freedom from all earthly fear.<sup>4</sup>

God alone is omniscient. Man in the flesh is essentially imperfect. He may be described as being made in the image of God, but he is far from being God. God is invisible, beyond the reach of the human eye. All that we can do, therefore, is to try to understand the words and actions of those whom we regard as men of God. Let them soak into our being and let us endeavour to translate them into action, but only so far as they appeal to the heart.<sup>5</sup>

### *Be in Tune*

ALL we do in the name of God should be in tune. If we are out of tune outside, we are likely to be out of tune within.<sup>6</sup>

It is good to sing God's Name in a tuneful manner, but to come to prayer simply to hear a *Bhajan* well sung is to miss the meaning of prayer. The most tuneful *Bhajan* is that which comes from the heart, no matter how poor in quality is the voice of the singer.<sup>7</sup>



You do not come to prayer to listen to music, or to admire this man's or that man's voice, but in order that you may carry with you for the day something from what you hear to guide and inspire you in all your actions. If we do not do so, all our prayers would be like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. What a great song was to-day's! Kabir, in his homely telling way, has described the treasures of the humble. It is not he that exalteth himself, but he that humbleth himself that shall see God, says Kabir. We have to be humble like the ant and not proud like the elephant. But I give the song itself:

*"Only he who humbleth himself will find the Lord.*

*It is no use your going to the weaver with coarse yarn, and asking for fine cloth from him.*

*Hard earth is no use to the potter, unless he beats it into very fine powder for clay. Then and then only can it be fit for the wheel.*

*An elephant will try in vain to pick up the grains of sugar scattered in grains of sand. But an ant will easily pick them up. Humble thyself therefore.*

*For, he who exalteth himself shall be crushed. But says Kabir, he who humbleth himself shall find God."*<sup>8</sup>

### *Keep Peace and Order at Prayer Time*

THERE is a time for laughing and shouting, and a time for observing silence and being serious. I have often said that a people who want to be free should learn to mount the gallows with a smile upon the face. But laughter becomes an offence against decorum if it is out of season. Similarly, shouting out of season is an exhibition of bad manners.<sup>9</sup>

If the women must talk or if they have not trained their children to keep quiet during prayers, they should stand away from the rest so as not to disturb the prayer gathering. God is omnipresent and omnipotent. He is

All-Merciful and long suffering. It is unbecoming to abuse His generosity by creating a disturbance in the prayer meetings. There is no fun in your coming to see the old man or merely to hear my voice. If you find some sense in what I say, you should try to practise it in your own lives.<sup>10</sup>

True culture requires that there should be perfect peace in the prayer ground at the time of the prayer. There should be an atmosphere of solemnity as in a church, a mosque or a temple. I know that many of the temples are full of clamour. It has hurt me deeply. We go to the temple to worship not the stone or the metal image, but God who resides in it. The image becomes what man makes of it. It has no power independently of the sanctity with which it is invested by the worshipper. Therefore, everyone, including children, should observe perfect silence at the time of prayer.<sup>11</sup>

Noise is not erased by making greater noise. It can only be stilled by people making mute signs and never pushing forward. Peace and order are necessary at all gatherings, but are especially so at prayer gatherings. People come together for prayers in order to obtain peace, to hear God's Name and to recite it. Therefore, those who come should really attune themselves even as they start from their homes. Let them be silent and let their thoughts dwell, as they walk, on prayer. Otherwise, coming to prayers is useless.<sup>12</sup>

### *No Smoking on the Prayer-Ground*

MOST of the Christians are given to smoking. Yet no one ever smokes inside a church. Similarly, the Muslims would throw down their cigarettes before entering the mosque. No one could drink inside a mosque. The prayer ground is a church, mosque, temple, synagogue and *agiari* combined into one. Correct conduct requires that

there should be no smoking on the prayer-ground, and we should all sit quietly from the beginning to the end of the prayers.<sup>13</sup>

### *Be Punctual at Prayers*

I HAVE been told that I have been coming to the prayer meeting late. That is not so. Only my watch is slow and I keep time by it. Unpunctuality is not my weakness. Still less can I afford wilfully to be unpunctual at the prayer gathering, where we assemble for the solemn purpose of renewing our covenant with God. If we have to catch a train, we try to reach the station well in time because the train waits for nobody. That is even more true of God—the wheel of His Law never stops nor slows down.<sup>14</sup>

It should be the general rule that prayers must not be delayed for anybody on earth. God's time never stops. From the very beginning, the wheel of His time has gone ceaselessly on. As a matter of fact, there is no beginning for Him or His time.

God is not a person. No one can describe Him as no one has seen Him. He is the Law and the Law-giver combined into one. The author of the *Vedas*, after the profoundest search, has described Him as *Neti, Neti* (not this, not this). He moves all and yet no one can move Him. Not a blade of grass moves without His will. For Him, there is no beginning and no end.

Everything that has a beginning must end. The sun, the moon and the earth must all perish one day, even though it might be after an incalculable number of years. God alone is immortal, imperishable. How can man find words to describe Him? How can anyone afford to miss the time of offering prayers to Him whose watch never stops?

If we kept the time for the prayers, the habit would

be reflected in all that we do. A man who works regularly in a systematic fashion never feels overworked or tired. It is not hard work that kills a man, but irregularity or lack of system.<sup>15</sup>

### *Path of Truth*

THE devotee says : 'Keep my heart pure—guide me on the path of Truth. Give me true happiness which springs from holding on to the Truth. Destroy the misery which results from relinquishing Truth.' Believe me when I tell you, after 60 years of personal experience, that the only real misfortune is to abandon the path of Truth. If you but realize this, your one prayer to God will always be to enable you to put up without flinching with any number of trials and hardships that may fall to your lot in the pursuit of Truth.<sup>16</sup>

### *Essential Prerequisite of Prayer*

TO err is human. By confessing we convert our mistakes into stepping stones for advance. On the contrary, a person who tries to hide his mistakes becomes a living fraud and sinks down. Man is neither brute nor God, but a creature of God striving to realize his divinity. Repentance and self-purification are the means. The moment we repent and ask God for forgiveness for our lapse, we are purged of our sin and new life begins for us. True repentance is an essential prerequisite of prayer.

Prayer is not mere lip service. It must express itself through action.<sup>17</sup>

### *Dedicate All to God*

IN a moment of introspection, the poet asks himself:

"O Man, why have you left off taking God's Name?

You have not given up anger or lust or greed,

But you have forgotten Truth.

*What a tragedy to save worthless pennies,  
And to let go the priceless gem of God's love!  
O Fool! renounce all vanities,  
And throw yourself on the grace of God's love."*

This does not mean that if one has wealth, it should be thrown away, and wife and children should be turned out of doors. It simply means that one must give up attachment to these things and dedicate one's all to God and make use of His gifts to serve Him only. It also means that if we take His Name with all our being, we are automatically weaned from all lust, untruth and baser passions.

In the first *shloka* of *Ishopanishad*, that is repeated every day at the beginning of the prayer, one is asked to dedicate everything to God and then use it to the required extent. The principal condition laid down is that one must not covet what belongs to another. These two maxims contain the quintessence of the Hindu religion.

In another *shloka*, which is recited during the morning prayer, it is said: 'I do not ask for temporal power, nor do I ask to go to Heaven, nor even to attain *Nirvana*. What I ask for is that I may be able to relieve the pain of those who are in pain.' The pain might be physical, mental or spiritual. Spiritual pain, due to slavery to one's passions, is sometimes greater even than the physical.

But God does not come down in person to relieve suffering. He works through human agency. Therefore, prayer to God, to enable one to relieve the suffering of others, must mean a longing and readiness on one's part to labour for it.

The prayer is not exclusive. It is not restricted to one's own caste or community. It is all inclusive. It comprehends the whole of humanity. Its realization



would thus mean the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Philosopher's Stone*

THE spirit of prayer must abide with us all the twenty-four hours, if it is a heart prayer and not merely from the lips. The real peace of prayer can come to our hearts only if God enters therein. Then, we will be the same outwardly as we are within. We will be honest, we will be truthful, we will cheat no one if we are in business.<sup>19</sup>

The poet has likened God to the philosopher's stone. The proverbial philosopher's stone is said to turn iron into gold. That is not always desirable. For instance, if all the rails of the railway track were turned into gold by the touch of the stone, the trains would not be able to run over them. But the touch of God purifies the soul. That is always desirable. That philosopher's stone is within us all.<sup>20</sup>

### *Reign of God*

TO repeat *Ramanama* and to follow the way of Ravana in actual practice is worse than useless. It is sheer hypocrisy. One might deceive oneself or the world, but one cannot deceive the Almighty. To-day, in the West, people talk of Christ, but it is really the Anti-Christ that rules their lives. Similarly, there are people who talk of Islam, but really follow the way of Satan. It is a deplorable state of affairs. We are afraid of people professing religions other than our own. We think they will crush us, forgetting that no one can crush us if we have made God our refuge. The hymn that has just been sung describes how God has redeemed sinners. How much more, then, would He do for His devotees? But they must be devotees of God in the true sense of the term. If people follow the way of God, there would not be all that corruption and

profiteering that we see in the world. The rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. Hunger, nakedness and death stare one in the face. These are not the marks of the Kingdom of God but that of Satan, Ravana or the Anti-Christ. We cannot expect to bring the reign of God on earth by merely repeating His Name with the lips. Our conduct must conform to His ways instead of Satan's.<sup>21</sup>

### *Five Kinds of Physicians*

THE verse from the *Zend Avesta* describes five kinds of physicians, but the fifth is the true physician, who depends on nothing but the Name of God for healing. *Ramanama* is the sovereign remedy. It is an agreeable surprise to me to find an authority for it in the *gatha*.

In the song that has been sung, the poet says that God is hidden and yet present everywhere. That is true. He knows our innermost thoughts better than we ourselves can do. One who depends on God will never be afraid of anybody, not even of the most despotic government on earth or its officers. For he will have as his protector the King of Kings, from whose eye nothing is hid.

The verse from the *gatha* says: 'Let me remember Thee by making my heart pure by righteous thought, by performing good and wise deeds and by right speech.' Unless all these conditions are fulfilled, one cannot expect to come near God.

Then, the poet says: 'We bow to Thee and thank Thee for all that Thou hast done for us. We will always remain Thy debtors.' What is this debt towards God and how can one repay it? The answer is: by discharging one's duty completely. And since no mortal can completely discharge his duty in life, he must for ever remain a debtor to God.

Just as a tree has many branches but one root, simi-

larly the various religions are the leaves and branches of the same tree. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism are the main branches, but as for varieties of religion, they are as numerous as mankind. If we took the Name of God in the prayer gathering and forgot all about it on going out, it is not prayer but blasphemy. Religion has to be lived every moment of one's life.

The girls have sung: 'With folded hands, O Mazda! I beg of Thee to give me true knowledge and enable me to devote every moment of my life to the service of Thy creation.' It is a great prayer. The devotee begs of God to fill him or her with the thirst for service, so that service will become a pleasure and not a task. But what is the meaning of service? Is killing fellow human beings in war, for instance, also service? No. Therefore, the devotee says: 'Whatever I do, whether in order to serve others or myself, let all my deeds be pure and noble. Let them fill me with Thy joy.' A man who lives up to this prayer would always be filled with His joy.<sup>22</sup>

## CHAPTER XXIV

### NO PRAYER WITHOUT FASTING

**I** BELIEVE that there is no prayer without fasting, and there is no real fast without prayer.<sup>1</sup>

But both have to come from the heart. A parrot-like repetition of the choicest sentiment and mere starvation of the body would be worse than useless. Prayer and fasting avail where there is a definite consciousness of the presence of God in us, even as we have of friends living under the same roof. Self-deception will not do.<sup>2</sup>

The *Shastras* tell us that when people in distress prayed to God for relief and He seemed to have hardened His heart, they declared a 'fast unto death' till God had listened to their prayer. Religious history tells us of those who survived their fast, because God listened to them, but it tells us nothing of those who silently and heroically perished in the attempt to win the answer from a deaf God. I am certain that many have died in that heroic manner, but without their faith in God and non-violence being in the slightest degree diminished. God does not always answer prayers in the manner we want Him to. For Him life and death are one, and who is able to deny that all that is pure and good in the world persists because of the silent death of thousands of unknown heroes and heroines!<sup>3</sup>

#### *Common Injunctions*

MY religion says that only he who is prepared to suffer can pray to God. Fasting and prayer are common injunctions in my religion. But I know of this sort of penance even in Islam. In the life of the Prophet I have read that the Prophet often fasted and prayed, and forbade others to copy him. Someone asked him why he did not

allow others to do the thing he himself was doing. 'Because I live on food divine,' he said. He achieved most of his great things by fasting and prayer. I learnt from him that only he can fast who has inexhaustible faith in God. The Prophet had revelations not in moments of ease and luxurious living. He fasted and prayed, kept awake for nights together and would be on his feet at all hours of the night as he received the revelations. Even at this moment, I see before me the picture of the Prophet thus fasting and praying.<sup>4</sup>

### *Mortification of Flesh*

MORTIFICATION of the flesh has been held all the world over as a condition of spiritual progress. There is no prayer without fasting, taking fasting in its widest sense. A complete fast is a complete and literal denial of self. It is the truest prayer. "Take my life and let it be, always only all for Thee" is not, should not be, a mere lip or figurative expression. It has to be a wreckless and joyous giving without the least reservation. Abstention from food and even water is but the mere beginning, the least part of the surrender.<sup>5</sup>

### *No Prayer Without Fasting*

I KNOW now more fully than ever that there is no prayer without fasting, be the latter ever so little. And this fasting relates not merely to the palate, but all the senses and organs. Complete absorption in prayer must mean complete exclusion of physical activities till prayer possesses the whole of our being and we rise superior to, and are completely detached from, all physical functions. That state can only be reached after continual and voluntary crucifixion of the flesh. Thus all fasting, if it is a spiritual act, is an intense prayer or a preparation for it. It is a yearning of the soul to merge in the Divine Essence.<sup>6</sup>



## CHAPTER XXV

### PHYSICAL CALAMITIES AND GOD

I SHARE the belief with the whole world—civilized and uncivilized—that calamities such as the Bihar one<sup>a</sup> come to mankind as chastisement for our sins. When that conviction comes from the heart, people pray, repent and purify themselves. I regard untouchability as such a grave sin as to warrant divine chastisement. I am not affected by posers such as 'why punishment for an age-old sin' or 'why punishment to Bihar and not to the South' or 'why an earthquake and not some other form of punishment.' My answer is : 'I am not God. Therefore, I have but a limited knowledge of His purpose.'

Such calamities are not a mere caprice of the Deity or Nature. They obey fixed laws as surely as the planets move in obedience to laws governing their movement. Only we do not know the laws governing these events and, therefore, call them calamities or disturbances. Whatever, therefore, may be said about them must be regarded as guess work. But guessing has its definite place in man's life. It is an ennobling thing for me to guess that the Bihar disturbance is due to the sin of untouchability. It makes me humble, it spurs me to greater effort towards its removal, it encourages me to purify myself, it brings me nearer to my Maker. That my guess may be wrong does not affect the results named by me. For, what is guess to the critic or the sceptic is a living belief with me, and I base my future actions on that belief. Such guesses become superstitions when they lead to no purification and may even lead to feuds.

But such misuse of divine events cannot deter men of faith from interpreting them as a call to them for re-

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<sup>a</sup>Reference is to the Bihar earthquake of 1934.

pentance for their sins. I do not interpret this chastisement as an exclusive punishment for the sin of untouchability. It is open to others to read in it divine wrath against many other sins.<sup>1</sup>

### *Divine Chastisement*

THIS divine calamity has suddenly reminded us that all humanity is one. I want you to be superstitious enough with me to believe that the earthquake is a divine chastisement\* for the great sin we have committed and are still committing against those whom we describe as untouchables, *Panchamas*, and whom I describe as Harijans.

Let us derive the lesson from this calamity that this earthly existence is no more permanent than that of the moths we see every night dancing round lights for a few minutes and then being destroyed. This earthly existence of ours is more brittle than the glass bangles that ladies wear. You can keep glass bangles for thousands of years, if you treasure them in a chest and let them remain untouched. But this earthly existence is so fickle that it may be wiped out in the twinkling of an eye. Therefore, whilst we have yet breathing time, let us get rid of the distinctions of high and low, purify our hearts, and be ready to face our Maker, when an earthquake or some natural calamity or death in the ordinary course overtakes us.

Our forefathers and our mothers have taught us to think that, when a calamity descends upon us, it comes because of our personal sin. You know that when rain does not come in time, we perform sacrifices and ask

\*"You may call me superstitious if you like; but a man like me cannot but believe that this earthquake is a divine chastisement sent by God for our sins. Even to avowed scoffers, it must be clear that nothing but Divine Will can explain such a calamity. It is my unmistakable belief that not a blade of grass moves but by the Divine Will."

—*Harijan*: Feb. 2, 1934.

God to forgive us our sins. It is not only here, but I have seen it in England and South Africa that, when locusts descend upon fields or any such thing happens, they appoint days of humiliation, prayer and fasting and pray for the passing of the visitation. Then, I want you to believe with me that for this absolutely unthinkable affliction in Bihar, your sins and my sins are responsible. And then I ask myself what can that sin be to warrant the calamity which to-day staggers us and the whole world. Within living memory, there is no record of an earthquake of this magnitude in India. I tell you the conviction is growing on me that this affliction has come upon us because of this atrocious sin of untouchability; and I beseech you not to laugh within yourselves and think that I want to appeal to your instinct for superstition. I do not. I am not given to appealing to the superstitious fears of men. But I cannot help telling you what is going on deep down in my heart. You are free to believe it or reject it. If you believe it with me, you will be quick and think that in the Hindu *Shastras* there is no such thing as untouchability as we practise it to-day.

I myself do believe that, when we have visitations of this character, they have not only physical reasons and effects, but they also carry with them spiritual consequences. And if it is a superstition, it is a superstition which I share in common practically with all mankind. You may, if you like, reject this belief of mine, because my condemnation of untouchability is not dependent upon any visible chastisement that God has awarded or may award to us.<sup>2</sup>

### *Superstition vs. Faith*

WHEN I first linked the event with untouchability, I spoke with the greatest deliberation and out of the fullness of my heart. I spoke as I believed. I have long believed that physical phenomena produce results both

physical and spiritual. The converse I hold to be equally true.

To me the earthquake was no caprice of God, nor a result of meeting of mere blind forces. We do not know all the laws of God, nor their working. Knowledge of the tallest scientist or the greatest spiritualist is like a particle of dust. If God is not a personal being for me, like my earthly father, He is infinitely more. He rules me in the tiniest detail of my life. I believe literally that not a leaf moves but by His Will. Every breath I take depends upon His sufferance.

He and His Law are one. The Law is God. Anything attributed to Him is not a mere attribute. He is the Attribute. He is Truth, Love, Law, and a million other things that human ingenuity can name. I do believe with Gurudev\* 'in the inexorableness of the Universal Law in the working of which God Himself never interferes.' For, God is the Law. But I submit that we do not know the Law† or the laws fully, and what appear to us as catastrophies are so only because we do not know the universal laws sufficiently.

Visitations like droughts, floods, earthquakes and the like, though they seem to have only physical origins, are, for me, somehow connected with man's morals. Therefore, I instinctively felt that the earthquake was a visitation for the sin of untouchability. Of course, *Sanatani*s have a perfect right to say that it was due to my crime of preaching against untouchability. My belief is

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\*Poet Rabindranath Tagore.

†"We do not know God, we know Him only through the working of His Law. He and His Law are one. There is nothing outside His Law. Even earthquakes and tempests do not occur without His will—not a blade of grass grows but He wills it. Satan is here only on His sufferance, not independently of Him."

a call to repentance and self-purification. I admit my utter ignorance of the working of the laws of Nature. But, even as I cannot help believing in God though I am unable to prove His existence to the sceptics,\* in like manner, I cannot prove the connection of the sin of untouchability with the Bihar visitation, even though the connection is instinctively felt by me. If my belief turns out to be ill-founded, it will still have done good to me and those who believe with me. For, we shall have been spurred to more vigorous efforts towards self-purification, assuming, of course, that untouchability is a deadly sin. I know fully well the danger of such speculation. But I would be untruthful and cowardly if, for fear of ridicule, when those that are nearest and dearest to me are suffering, I did not proclaim my belief from the house-top. The physical effect of the earthquake will be soon forgotten and even partially repaired. But it would be terrible, if it is an expression of the divine wrath for the sin of untouchability and we did not learn the moral lesson from the event and repent of that sin.

There is an indissoluble marriage between matter and spirit. Our ignorance of the results of the union makes it a profound mystery and inspires awe in us, but it cannot undo them. But a living recognition of the union has enabled many to use every physical catastrophe for their own moral uplifting.

With me, the connection between cosmic phenomena and human behaviour is a living faith that draws me nearer to my God, humbles me and makes me readier

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\*"I know there are people who do not believe in the existence of God. I met them in England and there may be some here (India). They ask: 'Where is God?' and 'If there is God, why is there so much distress in this world?' But those who believe in God and prayers cannot show God."



for facing Him. Such a belief would be a degrading superstition, if out of the depth of my ignorance I used it for castigating my opponents.<sup>3</sup>

### *Visitations of Nature*

THE conviction is growing upon me day after day that human intellect is incapable of fully understanding God's ways. God in His wisdom has circumscribed man's vision, and rightly too, for, otherwise man's conceit would know no bounds. But whilst I believe that God's ways cannot be comprehended fully by man, I have firm faith that not a leaf falls without His will, and not a leaf falls but it subserves His purpose. If only we had enough humility, we would have no hesitation in accepting the recent earthquake as a just retribution for our sins. This is not to say that we can with certainty attribute a particular calamity to a particular human action. Very often, we are unconscious of our worst sins. All that I mean to say is that every visitation of Nature does and should mean to us Nature's call to introspection, repentance and self-purification.

The visitations of Nature are the inevitable—however long delayed they may be—consequence of our sins and are intended to rouse us from our spiritual slumber. The elephant and the alligator, the legend goes, were in their previous birth brothers. But, instead of loving each other like brothers, they hated each other and so were condemned to be born as natural enemies. Still, they refused to reform. One day, when the elephant visited the lake, the alligator seized his leg and tried to drag him under water. The deadly struggle lasted for "a thousand acons." Finally, when the elephant found his strength failing and only the tip of his trunk remained above the surface of the water, he called upon God and God came to his rescue. His delusion left him and he again loved

his brother, both of them being restored to their human form through God's grace. Nature utters its warning to us in a voice of thunder. It flashes it before our eyes in letters of flame. But seeing, we see not; and hearing, we do not understand. If we failed to pay heed to Nature's signals, Nature would exact her due with compound interest.<sup>5</sup>

Mankind is notoriously too dense to read the signs that God sends from time to time. We require drums to be beaten into our ears, before we would wake from our trance and hear the warning.<sup>6</sup>

### *Lesson from Calamities*

AS I viewed the picture of ruin spread out before me, I felt overwhelmed and crushed by the weight of human misery. But then I remembered Kunti's prayer: 'O Lord, send me misery and misfortune always, lest I forget Thee.' It may not be given to all of us to have Kunti's Himalayan faith to utter that prayer. But may we not at least learn from it the lesson of using our calamities as a means of self-purification and turning the mind Godward?<sup>7</sup>

Misfortune is not a proof of an individual's wickedness. All the same, there is an indissoluble connection between natural calamities and man's sin. There is an organic unity of all life. You cannot have an interruption of the moral law in one part without producing a reaction in the entire system. When one limb is afflicted, through it the entire body is punished. Every calamity should, therefore, lead to a thorough cleansing of individual as well as social life.<sup>8</sup>

### *Is God a Revengeful Deity?*

Q. Is the God who sent the earthquake a heartless and revengeful deity?

A. No, He is neither. Only His ways are not our ways. When we know that God Himself is the mystery

of mysteries, why should anything that He does perplex us? If He acted as we would have Him do, we would not be His creatures and He our Creator. The impenetrable darkness that surrounds us is not a curse, but a blessing. He has given us power to see only the setp in front of us, and it should be enough if Heavenly Light reveals that step to us. We can then sing with Newman: '*One step enough for me.*' And we may be sure from our past experience that the next step will always be in view. In other words, the impenetrable darkness is nothing so impenetrable as we may imagine. But it seems impenetrable when, in our impatience, we want to look beyond that one step. And since God is Love, we can say definitely that even the physical catastrophies that He sends, now and then, must be a blessing in disguise. But they can be so only to those who regard them as a warning for introspection and self-purification.<sup>9</sup>

### *Let Us Pray*

WHEN a man is down, he prays to God to lift him up. 'He is the Help of the helpless,' says a Tamil proverb. The appalling disaster in Quetta paralyzes one. It baffles all attempt at reconstruction. The whole truth about the disaster will perhaps never be known. The dead cannot be recalled to life.

Human effort must be there always. Those who are left behind must have help. Such reconstruction, as is possible, will no doubt be undertaken. All this and much more along the same line can never be a substitute for prayer.

But why pray at all? Does not God, if there be one, know what has happened? Does He stand in need of prayer to enable Him to do His duty?

•No, God needs no reminder. He is within everyone. Nothing happens without His permission. Our prayer is

a heart search. It is a reminder to ourselves that we are helpless without His support. No effort is complete without prayer, — without a definite recognition that the best human endeavour is of no effect if it has not God's blessing behind it. Prayer is a call to humility. It is a call to self-purification, to inward search.

I must repeat what I said at the time of the Bihar disaster. There is a Divine purpose behind every physical calamity. That perfected science will one day be able to tell us beforehand when earthquakes will occur, as it tells us to-day of eclipses, is quite possible. It will be another triumph of the human mind. But such triumphs even indefinitely multiplied can bring about no purification of self without which nothing is of any value.

Of course, we will forget this latest calamity, as we have forgotten the Bihar one. I ask those who appreciate the necessity of inward purification to join in the prayer that we may read the purpose of God behind such visitations, that they may humble us and prepare us to face our Maker whenever the call comes, and that we may be ever ready to share the sufferings of our fellows whoever they may be.<sup>10</sup>

### *Call to Prayer and Repentance*

ONE of the correspondents asks :

"At the time of the Bihar 'quake, you had no hesitation in saying that it was to be taken by *Savarna* Hindus as a fit punishment for the sin of untouchability. For what sin must the more terrible 'quake of Quetta be'?"

The writer has the right to put the question. What I said about Bihar was deliberately said, even as the lines on Quetta were deliberately written.

This call to prayer is a definite yearning of the soul. Prayer is a sign of repentance, a desire to become better,



purser. A man of prayer regards what are known as physical calamities as divine chastisement. It is a chastisement alike for individuals and for nations. All chastisements do not equally startle people. Some affect only individuals, some others affect groups or nations only mildly. Disasters like Quetta stun us. Familiarity with ordinary everyday calamities breeds contempt for them. If earthquakes were a daily occurrence, we would take no notice of them. Even this Quetta one has not caused in us the same disturbance that the Bihar one did.

But it is the universal experience that every calamity brings a sensible man down on his knees. He thinks that it is God's answer to his sins, and that he must henceforth behave better. His sins have left him hopelessly weak, and in his weakness he cries out to God for help. Thus have millions of human beings used their personal calamities for self-improvement. Nations, too, have been known to invoke the assistance of God when calamities have overtaken them. They have abased themselves before God and appointed days of humiliation, prayer and purification.

I have suggested nothing new or original. In these days of fashionable disbelief, it does need some courage to call men and women to repentance. But I can claim no credit for courage. For, my weakness or idiosyncrasies are well known. If I had known Quetta, as I know Bihar and Biharis, I would certainly have mentioned the sins of Quetta, though they might be no more its specialities than untouchability was Bihar's. But we all know that we have many sins, personal and national, to answer for. The call is to all these to repentance, prayer and humiliation. True prayer is not a prelude to inaction. It is a spur to ceaseless, selfless action. Purification is never for the selfishly idle, it accures only to the selflessly industrious.<sup>11</sup>



*Does God Feel Our Sorrows?*

Q. If God is the Father of this Universe, does He feel the sorrows of His children? If He feels so, then why did He work havoc and inflict so much misery on His children by the devastating 'quakes of Bihar and Quetta? Why did He humiliate an innocent nation — the Abyssinians? Are the Abyssinians not His sons? Is He not Almighty? Then, why could He not prevent these calamities?

A. The writer wants to know why, if God is a God of Mercy and Justice, He allows all the miseries and sorrows we see around us. I can give no satisfactory explanation.... Things are often not what they seem. It may be that what we mistake as sorrows, injustices and the like are not such in truth. If we could solve all the mysteries of the universe, we would be co-equals with God. Every drop of the ocean shares its glory, but is not the ocean. Realizing our littleness during this tiny span of life, we close every morning prayer with the recitation of a verse\* which means :

"Misery so-called is no misery,

Nor riches so-called riches.

Forgetting (or denying) God is the true misery,

Remembering (or faith in) God is true riches."<sup>12</sup>

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\* विपदो नैव विपदः संपदो नैव संपदः

विपद विस्मरणं विष्णोः संपन्नारायण स्मृतिः

## GLOSSARY

*Abhyasa* : practice; study.

*Advaita* : non-duality; absolute monoism.

*Agiari* : fire-temple of the Parsis.

*Ahimsa* : non-violence; love.

*Ahriman* : Spirit of Evil, in Zoroastrian religion.

*Ahurmazd* : Zoroastrian name for God.

*Allah* : Muslim name for God.

*Anand* : joy, bliss.

*Anekantavada* : belief in many doctrines; scepticism.

*Anekantavadi* : a believer in many doctrines; a sceptic.

*Ashram* : a hermitage; a home for community living; here reference is to Gandhiji's Ashram.

*Bhajan* : hymn; a devotional song.

*Bhajanavali* : a hymnal.

*Bhakta* : a devotee.

*Bhakti* : devotion.

*Brahmacharya* : celibacy; continence; self-restraint.

*Brahman* : Supreme Being; Ultimate Reality; God.

*Buddhi* : intelligence; understanding.

*Chit* : knowledge.

*Dada Hormazda* : Zoroastrian name of God.

*Darshan* : sight; vision; glimpse.

*Dharma* : religion; duty; law of one's being.

*Dvaitism* : doctrine of Dualism.

*Gatha* : scripture.

*Hari* : Hindu name of God.

*Himsa* : violence.

*Ishwara* : Hindu name for God.

*Jadugar* : magician.

*Japa* : recitation; repetition.

*Kalma* : a Muslim prayer formula ('*La ilah illa Allah, Mohammed Rasul-e-Allah*', i.e., there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah).

*Karma* : action; also used in the sense of fate.

*Karmayogi* : one who has devoted his life to the selfless service of others.

*Khuda* : Muslim name for God.

*Lila* : play; sport.

*Maharaja* : King of kings.

*Mantra* : a Vedic verse; a sacred formula.

*Maya* : illusion.

*Moksha* : salvation; liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

*Nama* : name.

*Nama-japa* : repetition of the name of the Lord.

*Narayan* : Hindu name for God.

*Nirvana* : utter extinction of egoism; Buddhist conception of salvation; supreme bliss.

*Nirvikara* : free from passions; passionless.

*Omkar* : the sacred and mystic syllable OM.

*Parmatma* : the Supreme Soul; God.

*Parmeshwara* : the Supreme Lord; God.

*Pranayama* : science of control over breath.

*Rahman* : the Merciful; God.

*Rahim* : the Compassionate; God.

*Ramanama* : the name of Rama—a Hindu incarnation of God.

*Ramadhun* : incantation of the sacred name of Rama.

*Rishi* : sage; seer.

*Sadhu* : a recluse; mendicant.

*Sat* : being; that which exists; truth.

*Sati* : a virtuous and chaste woman.

*Satya* : truth.

*Satyagraha* : Truth-force; soul-force; non-violent resistance.

*Satyagraha Ashram* : reference is to Gandhiji's *Ashram*.

*Savarna Hindus* : caste-Hindus.

**Shastras** : **Hindu scriptures.**

*Shiva* : a Hindu god.

*Shloka* : verse; stanza.

*Shraddha* : faith.

*Sthitaprajna* : a man of steadfast mind or intellect.

*Swadesh* : literally, belonging to one's own country; principle of using things made locally or in one's own country.

*Swaraj* : self-rule; self-government.

*Syadvad* : philosophy of 'probability' in matters of perception by the senses; a form of scepticism which is professed by a section of Jain thinkers.

*Syadvadi* : a believer in *Syadvad*.

*Tal* : rhythmic beating of time with hands during singing.

*Tapas* : austerities; penance.

*Vaidya* : an Ayurvedic physician.

*Vairagya* : aversion or indifference to life's interests and pursuits.

*Vedas* : the oldest scriptures of the Hindus.

*Vikars* : passions.

*Vishnu* : a Hindu name for God.

*Vishnusharanama* : one thousand names of Vishnu (God).

*Yoga* : the science of control of the body and the mind;  
the science of joining or uniting together the individual self with the Supreme Self.

*Yogi* : One who practises *Yoga*.



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## THE UNSEEN POWER

"There is an indefinable mysterious Power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this Unseen Power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses.

"I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a Living Power that is changeless; that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing Power of Spirit is God. And since nothing else I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is.

"And is this Power benevolent or malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent. For I can see that in the midst of death, life persists; in the midst of untruth, truth persists; in the midst of darkness, light persists. Hence, I gather that God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is the Supreme Good."

M. K. GANDHI

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